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ABSTRACT

A survey of the manpower who staff learning centers of the State University of Nebraska (SUN) is reported. Four learning centers in different geographical locations in the state--Scottsbluff, Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha--are available to learners who enroll in SUN courses, or wish consultation and advice on educational opportunities to meet their interests. The role, expectations, and training needs that learning staff reported for the period September 1, 1974 to December 30, 1974 are presented. The report is organized in four sections. First, the procedures used in preparing and administering a "Learning Staff Development Questionnaire" are discussed. The results are given in the second section for the questionnaire as completed by each of the eight learning center staff, and conclusions are drawn from the findings of the questionnaire in the third section. Finally, a set of recommendations for action is offered, including: assign learning centers a "clearinghouse" function; plan and implement specific training experiences for staff; examine the role and effectiveness of present learning centers before continuing and/or expanding them; carefully articulate the organizational relationship of SUN and the University of Mid-America; adopt an appropriate strategy for relating SUN to existing state "outreach" programs; and encourage and support experimentation with learning centers. (IBH)

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A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE, EXPECTATIONS, AND TRAINING NEEDS OF THE LEARNING CENTER STAFF OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Executive Summary No. 10

Office of
Research and Planning

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HE 010 409

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February, 1975

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This paper has been prepared as a summary of work on this topic. For elaboration of the work summarized herein, the reader is urged to consult Working Paper No. 10. Working Papers may be obtained by writing the Office of Public Affairs and Information Services, P.O. Box 82006, Lincoln, NE 68501.

The coordinator and primary author of this effort is G. Roger Sell. Contributions have also been made by Carol Williamson.

A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE, EXPECTATIONS, AND TRAINING NEEDS OF THE LEARNING CENTER STAFF OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report a survey of the manpower who staff learning centers of the State University of Nebraska (SUN). At the present time, four learning centers in different geographical locations in the state--Scottsbluff, Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha--are available to learners who enroll in SUN courses, or who wish consultation and advice on educational opportunities to meet their interests. Each SUN learning center was staffed on September 1, 1974 (and prior to the beginning of courses on October 1, 1974) with a co-ordinator and an assistant. This paper describes the role, expectations, and training needs which learning staff reported for the period September 1, 1974 to December 30, 1974.

The report is organized in four sections. First, the procedures used in preparing and administering a "Learning Staff Development Questionnaire" are discussed. Then, the results are given for the questionnaire as completed by each of the eight learning center staff. Third, conclusions are drawn from the findings of the questionnaire. Finally, a set of recommendations for action is offered.

Procedures Used in the Development and Administration of the Questionnaire

One of the initial activities of learning center staff upon joining SUN was to attend a week-long orientation in Lincoln. During that orientation period, learning staff were given a handbook which contained, among other materials, a description of the activities in which they would probably engage. The targeted activities of learning center staff were described in relation to

the role of learning centers in the SUN program, the operation of learning centers and the expected competencies of learning center staff. In that no one knew for sure what demands the enrollment of learners would have on learning centers and their staff, it was desirable to have some means for learning center staff to report their experiences in some systematic fashion. One means selected for the purpose of recording the experience of learning center staff was a Staff Development Questionnaire.

The Questionnaire itself was developed in three sections. The first section adapted statements from the orientation materials regarding the role, activities, and competencies of learning center staff. In three separate questions, learning center staff were asked to report through both closed- and open-ended items: (1) the priorities which they held for the role of learning centers, (2) the frequency and importance of various activities which they performed, and (3) the knowledge, skills, and sensitivities which they desired to obtain or already possessed. The intention of the first section of the questionnaire was to obtain a comprehensive statement of the role of learning centers and their staff.

The second section of the Questionnaire asked learning center staff to describe in narration form the expectations which they brought to the SUN program and how those expectations had been affected during the first four months. One of the important aspects of the second section of the Questionnaire was the extent to which learning center staff felt they had support in doing their job, as well as how learning center staff would define their effectiveness.

The third section of the Questionnaire presented learning center staff with an opportunity to evaluate the training and development activities in which they participated and to recommend areas for future activities.

The Questionnaire was mailed on November 27, 1974. All eight learning center staff completed and returned the Questionnaire by December 30, 1974. The Questionnaire was completed anonymously such that no individual or learning center

could be identified with the results. Furthermore, respondents were not identified by the position of coordinator or assistant. It was felt that these measures of confidence would support the openness and freedom of respondents.

Findings

Prior to synthesizing the substantive findings of the study, it is important to note some of the important methodological limitations. First, responses to the quantified items on the questionnaire are reported in group or "normative" fashion. As demonstrated in the data, individual responses to a given item may vary considerably from the group or average response. Therefore, one limitation of the study is the lack of confidence one can hold that the group findings are representative of any one individual respondent.

A second limitation of the study is the assumption that all respondents had the same referent for a given item. For example, when responding to Item #1 on the Questionnaire ("To what extent do you think that learning centers should perform the following services:"), to what extent were the preferences of "significant others" influential in the priority ratings? Or, another example, in the perceptions of important activities, who served as the reference for the SUN Administration? the Executive Director? the Provost? the Associate Provost? the Dean? the Director of Student Services? the Director of Academic Services?

A third limitation of the study is that the findings are time- and condition-bound. In large part, the data generated in the study refer to perceptions, preferences, attitudes, and sentiments. Some may refer to these as "soft" data, which over time can be expected to change, perhaps drastically. The SUN program was in its early formative stage when the data for this study was collected. The data themselves are indicators of an evolving program. Nevertheless, the findings should be viewed as important "base-line" data which have not only historical significance, but also contain a stimulus for corrective action.

Given these limitations, what follows is a summary of the findings from the study.

Learning center staff report that they perform a wide range of activities for the SUN program. For purposes of defining the current role of learning centers in the SUN program, the activities of learning center staff can be arranged within three functions: a course-related function, a clearinghouse function, and a management function.

Perhaps most of the current activities of learning center staff, as a group, relate to course activities. Four of the seven most frequently performed activities reported by learning center staff were: ensuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center; keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition; recruiting students in the local area; and, assisting students with the use of all materials in the center. Other course-related activities performed by learning center staff, in order of decreasing frequency, include: assisting students with course and general delivery problems, working to find additional ways to personalize and individualize the SUN instructional process, supervising the achievement assessment of all students coming to the center, and arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together.

A second set of activities performed by learning center staff relate to what may be termed a "clearinghouse function." These activities include, in order of decreasing frequency: advising students who contact the center by telephone, keeping informed on all educational programs to meet individual needs, counseling students visiting the center, serving as a learning consultant for the center, and seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional tutors or counselors.

A third function which can be defined for learning centers is management of activities (a) within the learning centers and (b) between the learning centers and other agencies. Within learning centers, staff maintain pertinent records on all students in their areas, operate and oversee the maintenance of all

technical equipment, engage in clerical-office procedures, and provide the center with library materials. Between the learning center and other agencies, staff engage in relating to the local community and otherwise serving as a local public relations officer for SUN, serving as a liaison between SUN and "host" institution, representing SUN to the educational institutions in the area, serving as a liaison between SUN and other surrounding institutions, and arranging social events.

To what extent is there agreement between the SUN administration and learning center staff on the importance of various learning center activities? As a group, learning center staff perceive the SUN administration to stress course-related activities to a greater extent than "clearinghouse" or management activities. Learning center staff, as a group, would prefer that more importance be attached to the clearinghouse function when compared with the course-related function of learning centers. For example, the most highly preferred services of learning centers by the staff were (1) referring students for credit by examination, and (2) directing students into educational or training opportunities not offered by SUN. The SUN administration and learning center staff are in apparent agreement that management activities should be the third area of importance.

To what extent are learning center staff equipped to do their job? Before this question can be answered, it is necessary to ask two related questions:

What job was learning center staff expected to do?

and,

How have the job expectations of learning center staff changed?

The comments of learning center staff on Part II of the Questionnaire are revealing. As a group, learning center staff represented themselves as highly optimistic and idealistic on joining the SUN program. The expectations of learning center staff, for the most part, were that learning centers had a

central place in the SUN program; that large numbers of students would desire counseling, advising, and other services of learning centers; that learning centers would help elevate the SUN program to a high level of visibility in adult education in the state: and, that a high degree of personal satisfaction and professional growth was obtainable as learning center staff. What learning center staff reportedly found in reality was that students at times chose to use the toll-free telephone line to SUN faculty and administration, thereby not availing themselves of the learning center; that learning centers were viewed in strategic locations as an alternate, supplementary resource in the SUN program; that fewer students contacted learning centers then expected; and, that procedural and coordination problems marked the early weeks of learning center operations. While some learning center staff recognized a great distance between the beginnings of a new program and the realization of its goals, patience and continued optimism was expressed for the evolving program. All learning center staff, to some extent, revised their initial job expectations.

Given the experimental nature of the SUN program, several factors, then, impinge on the effectiveness of learning center staff. One factor is the current level of capability exhibited by learning center staff. It appears that learning center staff desire additional competencies (knowledge, skills, sensitivities) in the following areas:

1. Competencies related to the course-related function of learning centers
   a. identifying and referring individuals in need of remedial or study skills.
   b. employing instructional technologies and materials.
   c. assisting individuals in learning assessment and goal setting.

2. Competencies related to the clearinghouse function of learning centers
   a. counseling and testing individuals, e.g. through CLEP.
   b. identifying and referring adults to learning opportunities in the community.
   c. evaluation of postsecondary educational objectives and programs.
   d. identifying specific resources in other postsecondary programs in adult and continuing education.

3. Competencies related to the intra-agency management function of learning centers.
   a. analyzing and applying principles of participative management.
   b. leadership for learning centers and staff assistants.
   c. financial aid available to students.

4. Competencies related to the inter-agency management function of learning centers.
   a. public speaking.
   b. explaining existing higher education opportunities to the public.
   c. continuing education, open learning.

A second factor impinging on the effectiveness of learning center staff is the intended role of coordinators and assistants in relationship to the SUN administration and faculty. Learning center staff report, almost unanimously, that they felt support from the SUN administration, other staff, and faculty. However, the role identity of assistants, as well as coordinators, was not clear to learning center staff. For example, is the main job of an assistant that of a secretary-clerk or that of a professional educator? Comments by learning center staff elaborate on this point.

A third factor affecting the jobs of learning center staff is agreement as to how effectiveness is to be defined, both qualitatively and quantitatively. At the present time, it appears that learning center staff lack clear guidelines as to how their job is evaluated or where they should place priority for the expenditure of resources.

A fourth factor impinging on the effectiveness of learning center staff is the problem of establishing a new enterprise like a SUN learning center. Procedural and coordination problems have been encountered during the first four months of learning center operations.

A fifth factor affecting learning center staff is the organizational relationship of SUN to UMA. Between the lines of comments made by learning center staff, one gets the impression that there exists concern for the actual and

potential relationship of SUN and its learning centers to UMA. For example, to what extent will UMA provide resources to SUN and its learning centers for the continued development of open learning in Nebraska? Also, to what extent will UMA direct the activities of SUN and its learning centers in Nebraska?

Finally, a sixth factor to be noted here as impinging on the effectiveness of learning center staff is the organizational relationship of SUN to UNL and other institutions in the state. Is SUN a fourth institution in the University of Nebraska system? Where will SUN eventually get its financial support? How does SUN differ from other adult and continuing education programs. Is SUN and its learning centers duplicating services and clientele of existing programs? If so, can SUN legitimate its existence? How will the organization dilemma be resolved?

Recommendations for Action

One of the hallmarks in the evolution of a postsecondary, open learning model in Nebraska was, in October of 1974, the enrollment of learners in the first SUN courses. The impact of this development necessitated our coming to grips with the operation of four learning centers in the state. Since August, 1974, the function of these centers has tested the best thinking of SUN staff. Caught up in the daily operation of course development and routine delivery problems oftentimes prohibits a systematic consideration of the issues related to learning centers. Time and limited experience now enables us to begin to identify issues critical to the delivery of educational services through SUN to Nebraskans and related strategies for dealing with these issues.

The SUN delivery system consists of more than learning centers, of course. One of the original intents of SUN was to make available educational opportunities to people in their homes. Some learners may thus choose not to use learning centers. The purpose of this section of this paper, however, is to focus on

what we have identified as eight recommendations for action related to learning centers for 1975. These recommendations derive both from observations on the actual operation of learning centers thus far, and from expectations held for learning centers by their staff and administration. These recommendations constitute basic directions for an evaluation of at least the learning center aspects of SUN delivery.

Recommendation #1: Learning centers should serve a "clearinghouse" function as well as course-related and management functions. The early conception of a learning center was, more or less, that of a media library which would house instructional resources for voluntary student use. That conception has evolved, at least in the mind of learning center staff, to one in which learning centers are active in course-related as well as program management and clearinghouse activities. The clearinghouse function has been quite unclear up to this point. However, learning center staff recognize that (a) an abundance of learning opportunities already exist for adults in their communities, (b) adults require help to assess their personal goals and educational experiences which they desire, and (c) someone should be helping to identify and refer adults to learning opportunities which are likely to meet expressed interests. The above are three components of what is referred to here as the clearinghouse function.

In the near future, and primarily because of inevitable funding issues, the SUN program is likely to require both state support and increased student enrollments in offered courses. These conditions will create stress in at least two respects. On the one hand, SUN probably will be competing with other post-secondary institutions in the state for financial support. To some institutions, SUN will probably be a threat to their funding base as well as the "market" which existing institutions serve. It would be to SUN's advantage in seeking state funding if it could demonstrate (a) that it is offering a set of services

not currently offered through existing programs, (b) that it is serving a clientele not currently served through existing programs, (c) that benefits accrue to other programs as a result of SUN's operation, and/or (d) that definite individual and community benefits result from SUN. SUN can distinguish itself in those four respects through the service it performs related to a clearinghouse function. On the other hand, a significant amount of time and energy of learning center staff may be required for student recruitment and registration if numbers of students enrolled in SUN courses becomes critical. In this case, someone probably will need to choose which activities assume priority, student recruitment and registration in courses or counseling and advising students of the many opportunities available to them other than SUN courses. The old dilemma of the numbers game is apparent here.

Given these two conditions, and the potential stress for learning center staff, it is recommended that a commitment be made to support learning center staff in their clearinghouse function and that student recruitment and registration not dominate their energies. Furthermore, it is recommended that learning center staff document their clearinghouse activities such that the impact on individuals and communities can be assessed and reported.

Recommendation #2: Specific training experiences should be planned and implemented for learning center staff. One of the immediate support requirements for learning center staff is continued training and development in strategic areas of the adult educator. It is recommended that an appropriate amount of resources, including learning center staff time and travel expenses, be earmarked for at least three of the following competency areas:

1. assisting individuals in assessing their learning and setting goals which are reasonable and obtainable;
2. counseling individuals for vocational and avocational decisions;

3. evaluating educational and training opportunities available in the community;

4. assessing the educational and training interests of segments of the adults in the community;

5. identifying and referring individuals in need of remedial or study skills;

6. the CLEP test program;

7. leadership for administering an adult, open learning program in the community;

8. preparation of programs to inform the public and institutions of the SUN program, learning centers and their functions, the planning of lifelong learning, etc.

9. continuing education in the state of Nebraska, program opportunities, and the SUN program.

In addition to providing training and development opportunities for learning center staff, an evaluation and follow-up of these activities should be undertaken. One focus for this evaluation would be the impact of the activity on the expectations and performances of learning center staff.

Recommendation #3: The continuation and/or expansion of learning centers should be conditioned by an examination of the role and effectiveness of present learning centers. Of critical importance to the continuation, modification, or expansion of learning centers is an evaluation of the role and effectiveness of the present learning centers. During calendar year 1974, a beginning data base was generated to address some of the topics related to this recommendation. Extended data for addressing these topics should be available during 1975.

Table 1 summarizes the topics and sources of information related to this recommendation. The topics are organized under four headings: research, staff development, management, and organizational. The sources of data are identified for both 1974 and 1975.

Table 1

A Summary of the Topics and Data Related to an Evaluation of the Role and Effectiveness of Learning Centers

TOPIC AREA/QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	
	1974 Data	1975 Data
A. Research		
1. What kind of learners use learning centers? a. learners with less than a college education? b. learners who live within a 20 mile radius of the learning center? c. learners who are enrolled in more than one course offered through SUN? d. learners who take SUN courses for credit? e. learners who are not enrolled in SUN courses?	Registration Form Logs in learning centers	Registration For Logs in learning centers
2. When compared with learners who do not use learning centers (or less frequently so), do learners who use learning centers (or more frequently so): a. withdraw less frequently from courses? b. achieve more? c. express more satisfaction w with a course? d. more frequently enroll in a second course? e. more frequently enroll in educational offerings outside of SUN?	Registration Form Unit test data End of course evaluation form SUN Central records Logs in learning centers	Registration For Unit test data End of course evaluation form SUN Central reco Logs in learning centers Interviews with students
3. What are the needs of individual learners which learning centers are attempting to meet, and how effective are learning centers in meeting those needs? Do learning centers have an adverse effect on learners, e.g., frustration at knowing learning center staff do not tutor or teach?	Telephone Survey Unit Evaluation Form End of course evaluation form Logs in learning centers	Telephone Survey Unit Evaluation End of course evaluation form Logs in learning centers Interviews with learning center Interviews wit students

Table 1 (cont.)

TOPIC AREA/QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	
	1974 Data	1975 Data
B. Staff Development		
1. What knowledge and skills are needed by learning center staff, and what training is required for new and continuing staff?	Staff Development Questionnaire Logs in learning centers	Interviews with learning center staff Logs in learning centers Literature and site-visits of other open learning programs with learning centers
2. What means of learning center staff evaluation exist, and in what manner are evaluative data used to help staff do their jobs well? What are the criteria for evaluating learning center staff effectiveness?		
C. Management		
1. What activities do learning center staff perform?	Staff Development Questionnaire Learning center logs	Learning center logs
2. Do learning center staff perform a clearinghouse function, i.e., linking learners with the various opportunities for learning? If so, in what ways? Does the learning center ex[illegible] primarily for the s[illegible] enrolled in SUN course[illegible]	Staff Development Questionnaire Learning center logs	Interviews with learning center staff Learning center logs
3. For what reasons do learners use learning centers? a. for meeting with faculty? b. for academic or vacational counseling? c. for peer contact? d. for testing? e. for previewing/reviewing videotapes? f. for reading materials? g. for listening to audiocassettes?	Logs in learning centers Telephone survey	Logs in learning centers Telephone survey Interviews with students

Table 1 (cont.)

TOPIC AREA/QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	
	1974 Data	1975 Data
4. What hours are learning centers accessible to students and do the available hours meet students' schedules? Do students use the learning center if open given hours?	Student survey	Student Survey
5. How frequently do faculty visit the learning center and are regularly scheduled visitations required?	Learning center logs	Learning center l Interviews with faculty, staff, and students
6. What is the need for learning center staff to meet with students outside the immediate area of the learning center?		Interviews with staff and student
D. Organizational		
1. What is the relationship between learning center and central office staff?	Staff Development Questionnaire	Interviews with s and administratio
2. What alternative staffing patterns have been considered for learning centers? a. What is the rationale for the present staffing pattern? b. How well has the present staffing pattern worked? c. What changes in staffing should be made for future learning centers and what experimentation is possible?		Interviews with s and administratio
3. What facilities, furniture, equipment, and materials: a. make a learning center conducive to learner use? b. make a learning center conducive to staff work?	Staff Development Questionnaire	Interviews with s administration an students
4. Do students view learning centers as a regular campus, and if so, does that influence their use of learning centers?		Interviews with students

Recommendation #4: The organizational relationship of SUN and UMA should be carefully articulated. What may have been organizational pitfalls during the evolution of SUN have the potential of exaggeration with the development of the UMA consortium. The Nebraska Delivery System (as well as those in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri) are conceived of as central to the effective operation of UMA. As users of UMA products and services--and as interpreters of learner interests--state delivery systems have the responsibility of relating to the various facets of UMA. This relationship can be more than the exchange of information.

One of the ways in which UMA/SUN organizational relationship can be articulated is to adopt a team approach to particular problems. By identifying problems that cut across UMA/SUN and by employing the talented viewpoints of varied individuals, representative teams with rotating leadership and extinguishable upon completion of the task could innervate the UMA/SUN organizational relationship.

Beginning early 1975, it is recommended that at least one joint UMA/SUN team be formed from staff in areas such as: course acquisition instructional design, research and evaluation, production services, public information, UMA administration, SUN administration, SUN faculty, and learning center staff. The purpose of forming the team would be to address one or more of the following problems:

> Market surveys for identifying areas of need for educational experiences that do not exist for specific target population (like registered nurses or pesticide operators), and estimates of the number and judged quality of courses required.
>
> Students withdrawals from courses, reasons for them, and remedial action desirable.
>
> Consulting services which UMA/SUN could provide to existing programs for the purpose of helping existing programs to sharpen their resources and goals.

Sharing and comparing information with other institutions like WICHE, Empire State, and the British Open University.

Implication of computer assisted instruction for UMA/SUN, and its potential impact on learning centers and learners.

Assessment of courses to be acquired, in terms of audience, potential effectiveness, and long-range cost implications.

Feasibility of the systematic use of cost and effectiveness data in staff decisions.

Baseline study of the impact of UMA/SUN on existing institutions in the State of Nebraska, including impact on student enrollments, faculty, programs, and services.

Baseline study of the impact of UMA/SUN on communities in the State of Nebraska.

Study to project the need for postsecondary education in the State of Nebraska, including the identification of where existing programs and available resources are in relation to that need, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

Development of a plan for accomplishing the self-sufficiency of UMA/SUN after the five year development period, including what assumptions are made in the plan.

Recommendation #5: The relationship of SUN to existing state "outreach" programs should be discussed and an appropriate strategy for implementation should be adopted. Of critical importance during 1975 is that the relationship of SUN to other adult and continuing programs in the state be examined carefully. At the present time, SUN is neither a legitimately recognized fourth institution in the University of Nebraska system nor a working part of UNL. SUN at the present time is an experimental "project" with outside funding. It is doubtful whether SUN can continue to hold all options open and to be all things to all people. Rather, three viable alternatives should be considered and then acted upon. First, SUN may become an arm of the Department of Continuing Education at UNL. In this sense, SUN would be on a collegial relationship with UNL Extension. Second, SUN may become a program with UNL at the Vice-Chancellor Level that includes UNL Extension and the Department of Adult and

Continuing Education. Third, SUN may become part of a University system program which includes UNO Extension, UNL Extension, and the Adult and Continuing Education programs. The implications and potential impact for SUN may be quite different under the three organizational arrangements.

Two activities, in particular, are recommended for 1975. First, the Scottsbluff Learning Center--where the UNL Extension Division and SUN are working cooperatively--could serve as a trial effort for other learning centers. In this regard, it is proposed that the Scottsbluff learning center undertake a series of activities which will identify community interest for educational experiences which UNL Extension, SUN, or some existing program can meet. Staff at other learning centers could both visit and participate in these activities.

Second, it is proposed that both learning center and SUN administration engage in an active identification and cataloging of learning experiences available in the communities of the state. In this regard, the UNL Extension Division, as well as the Adult and Continuing Education Program, could be invited to participate.

Recommendation #6: Experimentation with learning centers should be encouraged and supported. The present and future operation of learning centers has the potential for exciting experimentation. Planning for life-long education, community-based learning projects, and the impact of learning centers on communities are but a few of the issues that could be presented to agencies for outside funding. The welding of claims made for the egalitarian educational movement and the actualization of this movement in real settings could elicit favorable responses to funding proposals. It is recommended that a feasibility study be commenced during 1975 which would identify one of more communities in Nebraska interested in establishing its own learning center. A proposal could be drafted for submission to an appropriate funding agency to support one or

more community efforts to establish a learning center. Furthermore, present learning center staff should be encouraged to initiate and seek support for innovative efforts in their areas.

Recommendation #7: If present learning centers are continued, or new learning centers initiated, learning center staff recommendations should be carefully considered as strategic input. Findings from this study include of this report includes numerous recommendations by learning center staff for (a) dealing with problems already encountered through the operations of the four existing learning centers, and (b) improving the SUN program and its learning centers. In that the recommendations by learning center staff have been reported elsewhere, a summary of those recommendations will not be given here. Those recommendations, however, should be given serious consideration in present and future deliberations about learning centers and the SUN program.

Recommendation #8: The results from the "Learning Center Staff Development Questionnaire" should be promptly followed-up with learning center staff, SUN administration and faculty, and UMA administration and staff. One of the most impressive aspects of the Questionnaire as completed by learning center staff was the extent of commitment, capability, and team work exemplified by learning center staff. This amount of creative talent and potentially productive energy should not be taken lightly. Rather, the good faither and courage demonstrated by learning center staff should be reinforced and assisted towards higher levels of performance. One step in that direction would be to promptly follow-up with learning center staff on how their recommendations are being considered and the action which will be taken as a result of their input. Furthermore, the SUN administration and faculty--as well as the UMA administration and staff--should carefully consider the learning centers and their staff and how the various functions can be most effectively supported. Many of the issues which learning center staff confront are the strategic issues for SUN and UMA.

Epilogue

A draft of this report was discussed on January 30, 1975, at a joint meeting of the SUN Administration, learning center coordinators, and a staff member from the Office of Research and Evaluation. One outgrowth of that meeting was that individuals accepted responsibility for addressing the recommendations of the report. It was decided that:

Both the SUN administration and learning center coordinators would accept responsibility for Recommendation #5 (the relationship of SUN to existing state "outreach" programs should be discussed and an appropriate strategy for implementation should be adapted).

Learning center coordinators and the SUN administration, in conjunction with the Office of Research and Evaluation, would work toward Recommendation #4 (the organizational relationship of SUN and UMA should be carefully articulated), through efforts involving "market surveys."

The SUN administration would, in conjunction with learning center coordinators, address Recommendation #1 (learning centers should serve a "clearinghouse" function as well as course-related and management function), Recommendation #2 (specific training experiences should be planned and implemented for learning center staff), and Recommendation #8 (the results from the "Learning Center Staff Development Questionnaire" should be promptly followed-up with learning center staff, SUN administration and faculty, and UMA administration and staff).

The Office of Research and Evaluation would assist the SUN administration and learning center coordinators with Recommedation #3 (the continuation and/or expansion of learning centers should be conditioned by an examination of the role and effectiveness of present learning centers).

Learning center coordinators would be assisted by the SUN administration and the Office of Research and Evaluation in Recommendation #6 (experimentation with learning centers should be encouraged and supported).

The SUN administration would implement Recommendation #7 (if present learning centers are continued, or new learning centers initiated, learning center staff recommendations should be carefully considered as strategic input).

A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE, EXPECTATIONS, AND TRAINING NEEDS OF THE LEARNING CENTER STAFF OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Working Paper No. 10

Office of
Research and Evaluation

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September, 1975

Preface

During the latter part of 1974, and early in 1975, the State University of Nebraska (SUN) learning center staff were involved with an internal examination of their role, expectations, and training needs. This examination involved the completion of a self-administered questionnaire, a review of the results from the questionnaire, and a working session to determine action which would be taken in light of the results.

The above activities were documented in the form of a detailed "in-house" working paper, dated February 1, 1975. At that time, the detailed working paper was viewed as a document most germane to the continuing development of the SUN learning center concept, while an executive summary was prepared for external audiences. The details of the working paper, however, provide valuable insight for those interested in the thoughts, feelings, and activities of learning center staff during the early months of embarking on a new concept of postsecondary education. For this main reason, the "in-house" working paper is released for general distribution.

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Additional copies of this report, or an Executive Summary of this report, may be obtained from the Office of Public Affairs and Information Services, University of Mid-America, P. O. Box 82006, Lincoln, NE 68501.

This paper grew out of several activities which involved the SUN administration, learning center staff, and the Research and Evaluation Office. The paper, therefore, represents a joint effort of these individuals.

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A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE, EXPECTATIONS, AND TRAINING NEEDS OF THE LEARNING CENTER STAFF OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report a survey of the manpower who staff learning centers of the State University of Nebraska (SUN). At the present time, four learning centers in different geographical locations in the state--Scottsbluff, Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha--are available to learners who enroll in SUN courses, or who wish consultation and advice on educational opportunities to meet their interests. Each SUN learning center was staffed on September 1, 1974 (and prior to the beginning of courses on October 1, 1974) with a co-ordinator and an assistant. This paper describes the role, expectations, and training needs which learning staff reported for the period September 1, 1974 to December 30, 1974.

The report is organized in four sections. First, the procedures used in preparing and administering a "Learning Staff Development Questionnaire" are discussed. Then, the results are given for the questionnaire as completed by each of the eight learning center staff. Third, conclusions are drawn from the findings of the questionnaire. Finally, a set of recommendations for action is offered.

Procedures Used in the Development and Administration of the Questionnaire

One of the initial activities of learning center staff upon joining SUN was to attend a week-long orientation in Lincoln. During that orientation period, learning staff were given a handbook which contained, among other materials, a description of the activities in which they would probably engage. The targeted activities of learning center staff were described in relation to

the role of learning centers in the SUN program, the operation of learning centers, and the expected competencies of learning center staff. In that no one knew for sure what demands the enrollment of learners would have on learning centers and their staff, it was desirable to have some means for learning center staff to report their experiences in some systematic fashion. One means selected for the purpose of recording the experience of learning center staff was a Staff Development Questionnaire.

The Questionnaire itself was developed in three sections. The first section adapted statements from the orientation materials regarding the role, activities, and competencies of learning center staff. In three separate questions, learning center staff were asked to report through both closed- and open-ended items: (1) the priorities which they held for the role of learning centers, (2) the frequency and importance of various activities which they performed, and (3) the knowledge, skills, and sensitivities which they desired to obtain or already possessed. The intention of the first section of the questionnaire was to obtain a comprehensive statement of the role of learning centers and their staff.

The second section of the Questionnaire asked learning center staff to describe in narration form the expectations which they brought to the SUN program and how those expectations had been affected during the first four months. One of the important aspects of the second section of the Questionnaire was the extent to which learning center staff felt they had support in doing their job, as well as how learning center staff would define their effectiveness.

The third section of the Questionnaire presented learning center staff with an opportunity to evaluate the training and development activities in which they participated and to recommend areas for future activities.

The Questionnaire was mailed on November 27, 1974. All eight learning center staff completed and returned the Questionnaire by December 30, 1974. The Questionnaire was completed anonymously such that no individual or learning

center could be identified with the results. Furthermore, respondents were not identified by the position of coordinator or assistant. It was felt that these measures of confidence would support the openness and freedom of respondents.

Findings from the Questionnaire

A data summary from the Questionnaire as completed by the eight learning center staff is attached to this report. The discussion here will elaborate on that data summary as well as the analysis of results. The findings from each section of the Questionnaire will be presented in order.

Role of Learning Centers and Their Staff

The first item on the Questionnaire asked that learning center staff report their preferences for the services which learning centers could perform. An open-ended list of 14 potential learning center services was provided for completion by identifying each as "high priority," "moderate priority," or "low priority." When the items are scored "3" for high priority, "2" for moderate priority, and "1" for low priority, the group results obtained are shown in Table 1. The possible range of item scores was 17, from 8 to 24. The actual range of item scores was 10, from 15 to 24.

The most preferred services for learning centers were: (1) referring students for credit by examination, (2) directing students into educational or training opportunities not offered by SUN, (3) maintaining student records, (4) organizing student group discussions, (5) surveying training or educational needs in the communities surrounding the learning center, and (6) cataloguing references for student use. The least preferred services for learning centers were maintaining logs of activities of learning center staff, getting students together for social purposes, registering students for SUN courses, testing students for academic achievement in a SUN course, and recruiting students for SUN courses.

Table 1

The Preferred Services of
Learning Centers by their Staffs

Rank Order	Score	Service
1	24	Referring students for credit by examination, e.g., CLEP
2	23	Directing students into educational or training opportunities not offered by SUN
3	22	Maintaining student records, including background information, courses enrolled in, grades obtained, etc.
4-5-6	21	Organizing student group discussions
4-5-6	21	Surveying training or educational needs in the communities surrounding the learning center
4-5-6	21	Cataloguing references for student use, e.g., college catalogues, newspapers, texts, reprints, etc.
7-8-9	18	Counseling students for vocational decisions
7-8-9	18	Tutoring students for special instructional needs
7-8-9	18	Maintaining logs of students' use of the learning center services and materials
10-11-12	17	Recruiting students for SUN courses
10-11-12	17	Testing students for academic achievement in a SUN course
10-11-12	17	Registering students for SUN courses
13-14	15	Getting students together for social purposes
13-14	15	Maintaining logs of activities of learning center staff

It should also be noted that at least one learning center staff member felt that each of the following services should be of high priority for learning centers:

...implementing and experimenting with new services

...interpreting UMA and UNL

...publicizing activities of learning center locally

...personal contact with student

...counseling students for study habits and personal motivation

...contacts with placement services to refer students to "experts" in vocational placement

...looking for nontraditional learning experiences in the community

...sponsoring awareness sessions for community to get idea of what they want from the university in SUN, extension, etc.

The second item on the Questionnaire listed a set of activities which learning center staff might perform. Each staff member rated the frequency, from "very often" to "never," with which each activity was performed, and then judged the importance of each activity for (a) the SUN administration, and (b) himself or herself, personally. The results from both aspects of this item on the Questionnaire are given next.

When the item activities are scored "3" for very often, "2" for often, "1" for seldom, and "0" for never, the group results obtained are shown in Table 2. The possible range of item scores for the activities was 25, from 0 to 24. The actual range of item scores was 15, from 7 to 21.

Table 2

The Frequency of Learning
Center Staff Activities

Rank Order	Score	Activity
1	21	Insuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center
2-3	20	Maintaining pertinent records on all students
2-3	20	Keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition
4	18	Operating and overseeing the maintenance of all technical equipment located in the center
5-6-7	17	Recruiting students in the local area
5-6-7	17	Assisting students with the use of all materials in the center
5-6-7	17	Advising students who contact the center by telephone
8	16	Keeping informed on all educational programs available to meet individual needs
9-10	15	Relating to the local community and otherwise serving as the local public relations officer for SUN in the particular area
9-10	15	Assisting students with course and general delivery problems
11-12	14	Counseling students visiting the center
11-12	14	Working to find additional ways to personalize and individualize the SUN instructional process
13	13	Serving as a liaison between SUN and "host" institution
14-15	12	Serving as a learning consultant for the center
14-15	12	Supervising the achievement assessment of all students coming to the center

Table 2 (con'd)

Rank Order	Score	Activity
16	11	Representing SUN to the educational institutions in the area
17-18	9	Serving as a liaison between SUN and other surrounding educational institutions
17-18	9	Arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together
19	8	Arranging social events much as open house
20	7	Seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional tutors or counselors

The most frequently performed activities reported by learning center staff were: (1) insuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center, (2) maintaining pertinent records on all students, (3) keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition, and (4) operating and overseeing the maintenance of all technical equipment located in the center. The least frequently performed activities reported by learning center staff were seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional tutors or counselors, arranging social events such as open house, arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together, and serving as liaison between SUN and other surrounding educational institutions.

Two additional activities mentioned by learning center staff as frequently performed were clerical office procedures and providing center with library materials on adult education and open learning.

Given the frequency with which learning center staff perform the activities in Table 2, how important do learning center staff perceive those activities to be for the SUN Administration and for themselves? Table 3 provides a summary of data to address this question. In that staff employed different scales, e.g., 1-10 and 1-20, in responding to a rank order of the activities, all rank ordering was converted to a percentage. The lower the percentage the higher the rank order of the importance of the activity. For example, on a scale of 1-20, an activity rank ordered as 5 would have a value of .250, while an activity rank ordered as 15 would have a value of .750. On a scale of 1-10, an activity rank ordered as 3 would have a value of .300, while an activity rank ordered as 8 would have a value of .800. In this manner it was judged that the relative importance of the activities could be reported even though respondents used different scales in their rank ordering.

Table 3

Rank Ordered Importance of Activities
Performed by Learning Center Staff

	Activity (Ordered according to frequency of performance)	Perceived Importance to SUN Administration		Importance to Learning Center Staff	
		Mean Score	Rank Order	Mean Score	Rank Order
1	Insuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center	.338	1	.408	8
2-3	Maintaining pertinent records on all students	.464	9	.496	13
2-3	Keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition	.358	3	.129	1
4	Operating and overseeing the maintenance of all technical equipment located in the center	.595	14	.579	16
5-6-7	Recruiting students in the local area	.564	13	.590	18
5-6-7	Assisting students with the use of all materials in the center	.462	8	.402	7
5-6-7	Advising students who contact the center by telephone	.412	5	.308	6
8	Keeping informed on all educational programs available to meet individual needs	.351	2	.199	3
9-10	Relating to the local community and otherwise serving as the local public relations officer for SUN in the particular area	.456	7	.430	9
9-10	Assisting students with course and general delivery problems	.440	6	.282	5
11-12	Counseling students visiting the center	.493	11	.168	2
11-12	Working to find additional ways to personalize and individualize the SUN instructional process	.373	4	.275	4

Table 3 (Con'd)

	Activity (Ordered according to frequency of performance)	Perceived Importance to SUN Administration		Importance to Learning Center Staff	
		Mean Score	Rank Order	Mean Score	Rank Order
13	Serving as a liaison between SUN and "host" institution	.720	17	.670	19
14-15	Serving as a learning consultant for the center	.473	10	.448	10
14-15	Supervising the achievement assessment of all students coming to the center	.738	18	.539	15
16	Representing SUN to the educational institutions in the area	.513	12	.532	14
17-18	Serving as a liaison between SUN and other surrounding educational institutions	.629	16	.588	17
17-18	Arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together	.819	20	.494	12
19	Arranging social events much as open house	.778	19	.863	20
20	Seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional tutors or counselors	.621	15	.464	11

Several observations can be made regarding Table 3. Learning Center staff rated the importance of three activities significantly higher for themselves than that which they perceived for the SUN administration. Those three activities are: keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition; counseling students visiting the center; and, arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together. Less importance was attached by learning center staff than that perceived for the SUN administration to insuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center, to maintaining pertinent records on all students, and to recruiting students in the local area. The relative importance of the remaining activities are congruent between the learning center staff ratings and the perceived values of the SUN administration.

When comparing importance and frequency of the activity, it appears that learning center staff would prefer to increase the frequency of: seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional local tutors or counselors, keeping informed on all educational programs to meet individual needs, counseling students visiting the center, arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together, and working to find additional ways to personalize and individualize the SUN instructional process. On the other hand, it appears that learning center staff would prefer to decrease the frequency of: maintaining pertinent records on all students, insuring that all course components are readily available in the center, recruiting students in the local area, and operating and overseeing the maintenance of all technical equipment located in the center. The remaining activities appear to be congruent between frequency of performance and the importance of them attached by the learning center staff.

The third item on the Questionnaire listed a set of competency areas in which learning center staff may already possess or desire requisite knowledge,

skills, and sensitivities. Results from this item indicate that some learning center staff already possess, but others desire further, capabilities in public speaking, counseling, identifying learning resources in the community, referring individuals in need of remedial or study skills, referring individuals to educational experiences other than those offered by SUN, evaluation of postsecondary educational objectives and programs, and employing instructional technologies and materials. New areas recommended for additional training include interpreting UNL to the public, analyzing local educational means, applying principles of participative management, identifying specific resources in other postsecondary programs, CLEP, Extension Division, adult learners and their needs, and open learning philosophies.

Learning Center Staff Expectations

The second part of the Questionnaire dealt with the expectations which learning center staff brought to the SUN program and how those expectations were affected during the ensuing four months. In addition, learning center staff were asked to comment on the extent of support which they felt in the job and how their effectiveness could be improved. In that the responses to this item in the Questionnaire were in essay form, the method of reporting here will draw on excerpts from those comments.

1. Expectations held by learning center staff for the SUN program.

A range of optimistic expectations were held by learning center staff on joining the SUN program. For example,

> I hope to be able to assist many adult learners, both SUN students and adults not enrolled in SUN, to find educational experiences that they would find worth their time and effort. I even hoped that I would be able to guide some learners in their total program or direction.

Another respondent expressed the following expectations:

> To find out about the whole field of continuing education from a macroscopic perspective; to find out about the adult learner, first-hand (i.e., types of adult learners, needs, course adaption to, expectations, etc.); and, to establish personal contact with personnel in other postsecondary continuing education programs in my area.

A third learning center staff member recalled:

> Last August when I was hired for the position of staff assistant with the SUN program, I had a vague idea of what SUN was. In the past adult education had always brought to mind visions of ladies taking decoupage or cake decorating several evenings a week. The idea of thousands of adults striving to get "piece-meal" college credit was totally new and very intriguing.
>
> The week we spent in Lincoln charged me with enthusiasm for what the SUN program's main objective was "bringing the classroom to the adult learner in his home via T.V., tape recordings, newspaper, etc." The nontraditionalism of the concept intrigues me. For too long educational philosophies had been in an ivory tower and "missing the boat" in terms of adults; they were unwilling to put up with the hassles, barriers, and inflexibility encountered all too often on traditional campuses.

From another perspective, the following account is given:

> I saw SUN as a separate entity, but have since learned to appreciate that it is but one component of the University of Nebraska system. When SUN talked about course development, I imagined only that it was building a curriculum based entirely on adult indications of interest from existing University of Nebraska courses. In other words, I realize now that I regarded SUN as a separate institution for adults to acquire college credit. Obviously, I did not give much thought to what "adults" were, but I sense now that I was thinking of people with full-time jobs who were unable or unwilling to leave their homes and/or families. This concept was corrected at the training session in Lincoln prior to the opening of the center; but I still carried the notion that SUN was a kind of "savior" and that students would flock to the program.

> Because SUN appeared to be such a high powered organization and because it appeared to use a highly sophisticated "systems approach" to solving problems, I wondered how much opportunity an individual at some small center would have in terms of expressing any creativity or originality. I rationalized and thought "no matter how much money SUN has, and no matter what a model system it appears to have, it will, finally, be made or broken by those who are the front-liners."

2. The impact of the SUN program on learning center staff expectations. The realities of the SUN program apparently changed some of the initial expectations held by learning center staff. For example,

> The picture that was originally painted on learning centers is quite different from reality. From a rather lengthy list of furniture and equipment items needed, SUN has provided only a couple of items. If it weren't for the kindness and cooperation from...staff, we would all be sitting on the floor instead of chairs. This is only one example.

Another respondent reported it this way:

> Although I did harbor some uneasy feelings about the purpose and functions of the Learning Center as an optional resource center, I was confident that it would all fall into place as the whole thing got underway. As our student enrollment materialized, we soon discovered that our area SUN students, for the most part, did not live near our Learning Center and therefore we served a limited function for them. They had the toll free Lincoln number for course problems and we merely implemented SUN directives; test scheduling, surveying, technical problems, etc.

The lack of student use of the learning centers was a harsh disappointment for some:

> The biggest disappointment with the learning centers, has been the lack of student use. The distance involved between learning centers and students, together with the push on college at home, has kept student use of centers very minimal. I feel that if students could register with the center, take tests in the centers together with the other uses they might make of the center, the effectiveness of the center would be much better.

Another respondent had this to say:

> Originally, I had envisioned rather a large amount of student contact. Because this was not a reality for us, we settled for quite a bit of telephone contact. We try to talk to our students on the average of 2 to 3 times a month. I find this an adequate substitute for the face to face interaction I had originally envisioned.
>
> As for my job expectations, there has been quite a bit of ambivalence due to low student enrollment in our area. There were many times when I have felt that there was a need to justify my job and to some extent, my activities. My original idea of my activities did not become a reality and I had to search for new direction. Because of our low student enrollment implementing SUN, memos and directives did not involve all my time. I have endeavored to acquire better skills in educational counseling, identifying resources available in the community which are potentially applicable for learning experiences, and in acquiring any skill that will aid me in becoming an effective member of our staff in terms of what functions our learning center should be directing itself.

Reactions to the lack of students in the learning centers caused one staff member to report the following:

> I expected our learning center to have an immediate impact on the area. It did not. I expected our learning center to be constantly filled with people. It was not. I expected the staff to be so busy counseling, advising, cooperating, assisting, tutoring, etc., that the center role would be determined by these activities. It was not. I expected the SUN courses to attract so many students that their interests and needs would fully monopolize staff time. They did not. The result was that my original expectation of being able to make a difference was realized not because of hordes of students, but through the need to get out and promote the SUN program, to establish contacts, to develop a rapport with existing educational institutions, and most importantly, to encourage the SUN students that we did have.

Another learning center staff member expressed similar sentiments:

> Many of my expectations upon entering SUN were personal and highly optimistic--perhaps unrealistically so. I foresaw an extreme personal challenge and a busy schedule. However, since the program is not yet in full swing I still hope for, things are moving much slower than I had

> anticipated and my "duties" are no more than those of a receptionist-clerk. In a way these expectations can be readdressed to my hopes for the LC. Our workload is not full. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many students are so entrenched with the idea of "college at home" that they have no need and less desire to come to us. Yet, too, this question may be premature since some of our activities are hindered by a budget (?). Once our future is sure, I'm sure our priorities and activities will change.

Lack of knowledge of the SUN program among residents in the state also revised some of the expectations of learning center staff. For example,

> I learned the hard way that a lot of people simply had not heard about SUN. Those who had for the most part already had degrees and were interested in graduate and advanced courses. I learned too of the limitations of the news media, i.e., only a certain segment of the population read newspapers and watch TV news; that the Omaha World-Herald is not necessarily read widely because it is the "state" newspaper; and that education news frequently is read only by educators. In addition, the limitations of having only two courses ready to go did not make a realistic impact on me until I got out into the field.

However, amidst the problems of initiating a new program, learning center staff still report optimism:

> Despite the fact that I regarded SUN as almost computer-like in terms of how it was creating its program, I also regarded its final product-bringing education to people-as a mission that I could become a foot soldier for willingly and enthusiastically. That notion has not changed. In fact, it has become the central point of my philosophy for the center, but that philosophy was not developed without some pain and frustration. And that experience, in retrospect, was worth a half-dozen courses scattered throughout adult education, human relations, the mass media, counseling, administration, and recruiting techniques.
>
> What I learned was that people do have educational needs, but that they are as diverse as the people themselves. Rather than the learning center serving an in-house kind of function, it appears that for the moment it is serving as a catalyst for out-reach kinds of activities.

> Furthermore, my belief in the potential of SUN has not diminished, but my expectations for that potential are based on its ability to respond to its mission with even more vision that it has had in the past. By this I mean that it is not enough to bring education to the people. They want and need to learn about things that are relevant to them personally, and they want that education readily accessible.

In the same stream of feelings, another respondant reported:

> I still feel the SUN potential is fantastic. It can help so many people and in today's world where people feel a need for higher education whether for tangible reasons or for personal fulfillment, SUN is the perfect answer. This is especially true for an area such as Nebraska where rural distances predominate and traditional schooling is not always feasible. And most of all the personal contact afforded to a student if he wishes it may keep the drop-out percentage down and also serve to encourage.

> When I first learned of SUN, I had an immediate faith in it. I expected many interested and curious people and I expected that these people would be enthusiastic students. On both counts my beliefs have been reinforced. I also believe that SUN students could possibly learn more, and more easily, than the traditional campus student. Again I feel my assumptions seem to be correct from what I have learned from talking to students. And most of all the enthusiasm of the average student does not wain even during the difficult lessons.

Part of the problems encountered during the initial weeks of learning center operations related to learning center staff knowledge of the project:

> Prior to joining SUN, I really had little knowledge of the project. However, following the week-long seminar in Lincoln, I felt that I did have knowledgable account of the entire program. Of course, since beginning of the program and the opening of the learning center, I have continued to fill in various phases of the program. At this point in time, I now feel quite comfortable with most aspects of the program as far as basic understanding and function is concerned. I still have some reservations following the last meeting in Lincoln. The general meeting I am referring to, in which I felt there was considerable difficulty in describing what SUN is, what it is doing and where it is going. I was most concerned because after more than two years, I

> didn't expect that much difficulty in getting to a more common agreement. I am aware however, that due to the nature of the project, this is not easy to do.

However, to other learning center staff, expectations have been partially met through:

> Papers, summary of presentations, meetings, and resource people who have visited with us have been quite helpful; personal contacts with students have done what could never be duplicated in any book.

Acceptance of some problems and constraints appear in the expression of several learning center staff. For example,

> Now that we have begun operation, I can see that what I did expect of the center, really cannot happen with the program in this early stage. It is necessary, therefore, for us to adjust our thinking and view with more reality, how it will function and how we must operate within those limitations. As the program expands, both with students and eenters, I can see a vast improvement possible as far as center concepts is concerned.

Another respondent puts it this way:

> In this city I feel good work could be done in getting courses offered that would assist the business community. That is, courses directed at definite needs of certain business areas. Being 3 months into the program and offering two courses (that every school offers), I have not had great success nor did I expect to this soon. I am old enough to be patient in most things.

One learning center staff member expressed intense frustration in answering the question:

> My expectations regarding the SUN learning centers have been so riddled from furniture to function that... I would prefer not to answer this question.

Perhaps some of the problems encountered during the early months of SUN learning centers will be overcome during the future offerings of courses. As one respondent reported:

> I feel many of these comments will be invalid once the second batch of courses begins. We will have repeat students and those who have learned from friends about us. Then also, the LC will be there from the beginning of recruitment.

And, to make full circle in the comments regarding the impact of the SUN program on learning center staff:

> The learning center is the place where there will be contact with the learners. This makes them very important in the program and satisfying to work with.

3. The effectiveness of learning center staff. What factors impinge on the present and future effectiveness of learning center staff? Responses to this question can be found in the comments of several learning center staff. For example,

> I think my effectiveness will depend on my knowledge of total educational offerings in the area and understanding of adult learners.

Another learning center staff member expressed this concern:

> Because of the experimental nature of the SUN program, no real precedent for learning centers or the type of staff needed had been established. It appears to me that the learning centers may be on the road now to having an identity in terms of roles and functions, but I wonder about the learning center staffs.

With regard to learning center coordinators, one perception was that:

> The coordinators represent a diverse background of experiences, and all seem to have the capacity to adapt to the evolving responsibilities of the centers. It seems to me that the over-riding factor involved in this is their prior experiences in higher education.

What about the effectiveness of assistants in learning centers? One respondent put it this way:

> As far as my effectiveness goes, I feel I would be more so if I were given more responsibility. I have never quite figured out the status of the staff assistants in the eyes of SUN central. Are we clerical help who is capable of responsibility or responsible staff who are capable of clerical duties. Of course, this too will change once the program is booming. Then the issue will force itself merely because one person will not be able to handle the whole schmere.

Another respondent had this to say:

> I have also become aware of the need to redefine the job responsibilities that are expected of the staff assistant. Many of my activities have gone beyond what was originally envisioned, as the role and responsibilities that the title maintains. I can see that the staff assistant's role can have more impact as SUN evolves. With growing student enrollment the amount of one-to-one student contact, can in itself, become a full-time activity. As the coordinator becomes involved with the ever increasing demands of recruitment, community public relations, public speaking engagements, etc., the responsibility for handling center activities while the coordinator is away falls on the staff assistant.
>
> It would seem that the assistant must have many of the skills and qualifications of the coordinator. This is an important consideration as more learning centers are planned for the future. A whole new dimension can be added to the staff assistant position. Many times I have felt that we do much more than at first anticipated, I find this to be very exciting and challenging. I am eager for the challenge and hope that SUN central will come to realize how potentially important the staff assistant position can become in the future of SUN.

What is the identify of assistants in learning centers and what satisfaction obtains in terms of job fulfillment? One staff member offered these observations:

> I suspect, however, that none of the coordinators really understood their assignment upon first accepting the job and immediately they were asked to select a staff assistant. Not fully understanding their own role, they were put in the position of determing the kind of person they needed. Each one picked a person with at least an undergraduate degree. In retrospect, I wonder if we did not error by not trying to select a person with strong secretarial expertise rather than one whose educational background prepared them for a position unlike that of a secretary.

> As the learning centers develop, I am sure that coordinators are getting a great deal of satisfaction in terms of job fulfillment. But what about our staff assistants? Have they been relegated to a secretarial position? Do we, in fact, need a staff assistant who is more than a secretary? If we do not, what should be done about our assistants who undoubtedly have aspirations for being more than a secretary? What responsibility should we feel toward them in terms of job fulfillment? When they were hired they were identified as staff assistants. Since then they have often been referred to by SUN central as assistant coordinators. Does SUN central expect them to perform as assistant coordinators or as staff assistants? And what does SUN central see as the difference between the two titles? Their expectations for their positions and their image of their own self-worth need to be dealt with at both the SUN central and the learning center levels.
>
> My recommendation would be to have each learning center coordinator and staff assistant re-write their job descriptions now that the centers are operational. Each coordinator should evaluate the job description written by the assistant and make appropriate changes from their vantage point of responsibility for the center. On the basis of these new job descriptions, perhaps a more descriptive title and responsible function can be developed for the staff assistants. If the job descriptions point toward a position that is secretarial in nature, at least then the staff assistants will be better apprised of the potentiality of their positions. In either case, my feeling is that SUN central should be advised of the center staff findings, and then react and/or respond according to its frame of reference. My recommendation is based entirely on where the learning centers are now, and SUN centrals' vision of the future may cast a different perspective on the matter.

Another recommendation for improving the effectiveness of learning center staff was:

> As we live in an area with limited library facilities, it has been difficult to find material pertinent to the areas in which I'm seeking a better understanding, i.e., adult education, adult learners, open learning and non-traditional education. I feel that it would be of great assistance to me and I'm sure other learning center staff, if some thought was given to supplying us with some material of this nature. Also, we have very limited information concerning academic career planning.

4. Support which learning center staff have in doing their jobs.

To what extent do learning center staff feel they have support in doing their jobs? One respondent reported:

> Overall, pretty good support (the responses to my telephone calls concerning SUN student affairs have been followed-up in a prompt fashion).

Another staff member made this comment:

> I feel that support from the community and SUN Central towards the centers has been just great. Anytime help has been needed it has been there. The willingness of everyone to help in any way they can, to me, is the strongest point of the program.

The feeling of SUN administration support is also shared by another:

> The central office I feel has been helpful and supportive in terms of any problems that have arisen involving our students. Their willingness to offer assistance has been most gratifying, and support from them most useful.

Again, in the positive stream, another staff member reports the following observations:

> To the credit of SUN central, the learning centers have been allowed to evolve in response to local situations. That is to say each learning center has been been able to read and respond to the unique situations of the region which it serves. There are specific SUN directives and responsibilities that make each center similar, but conformity to a pre-conceived "packaged idea" of the total role and function of each center has not been the order of the day.
>
> In addition, people at SUN central make themselves accessible to center staff. There is no hesitation whatsoever on the part of center staff to contact key personnel at SUN central either by phone or in person. Although the SUN central staff is fairly large, responsible people at SUN central have made a point of making sure that center staff meet key people who can be of assistance to them.

> Whenever center staff can articulate the problem they need assistance with, someone at SUN central usually can help. I particularly commend the secretarial staff at SUN central for their constant cheerfulness and helpfulness. Despite our frequent contacts with SUN central, they are always cordial and cooperative "above and beyond."
>
> The willingness of faculty members to visit the centers is a commendable thing, and their visits have enabled the staff to understand the courses better and, in turn, to interpret course objectives to students.
>
> For our center, student recruitment will continue to be a major priority for some time to come. Any assistance that we can get from SUN central will be helpful.

However, a tinge of negativism is portrayed in the following comments by a fifth staff member of a learning center:

> I feel a certain amount of job support in that every employee of SUN is made to feel one of the team. But I do feel that there is an attitude at SUN central that refuses to make the best use of the LC. The student is almost compelled to call or write Lincoln in the case of a problem. The idea of AT HOME study is so stressed that the LC seems an afterthought to the student who would rather get to the head man and clear up a problem that we could easily handle. Even though the student has received information from us stating out purposes and availability, most of them made initial contact with central and have never received a strong suggestion from Lincoln to make use of our facilities. We are always stressed as an extra resource. Perhaps some sort of info sheet stating who to call when would help. And since most students are going to make use of a toll free number rather than call us long-distance, they should be told to leave the message that they want the LC to get in touch with them rather than having Lincoln handle the situation. When this happens, the student's idea that the head guy is best is reinforced.

5. Problems in establishing learning centers. Several comments were made by learning center staff regarding the problems encountered during the early weeks of opening learning centers. For example,

> There were, I feel too numerous problems involved in setting the learning centers in action. I am referring to the nuts and bolts problems. This I am sure we could avoid in future openings. Such as: locations, equipment, staffing, communications, etc.

Ways in which problems could be dealt with are suggested through the following comments:

> Have all new learning centers fully equipped in advance of their openings (e.g., electric typewriters, no 1950 models, please), phones hooked up, chairs available, etc.
>
> Try to let the learning centers know well in advance (at least 2 weeks) when the course consultants plan to visit so that we can get notices out to students in sufficient time.
>
> Would also suggest including a chalk board in all learning centers for use by the course consultants when they visit and review with students.
>
> While it is understandable (printing and mailing problems, etc.), a significant effort should be made to get delivery materials to students ahead or on time. The rationale is simply this: In the beginning, we were led to believe that we could tell students that they could work on the course at their own rate (behind or ahead of schedule) and if the learning centers do not have all the necessary components ahead of time, then students cannot possibly work ahead of schedule. Alternatives: get materials to students ahead of time or do not lead center staff or students to believe that one could work ahead of schedule. Hopefully, this will be corrected when future course offerings come into play.
>
> If there are errors in study guides or texts, all revisions should be mailed immediately to each student enrolled in the course. We loose our credibility if we constantly give them wrong answers and the students themselves are not informed in writing as to errors in learning materials--it's a common courtesy to keep them informed about this. Whose responsibility? -- the learning centers or (in my opinion) the course consultant should assume the responsibility for getting this done.

6. Recommendations from learning center staff. How can the SUN program and learning centers be improved? Several comments are appropriate to this question. For example,

> Would suggest that all SUN personnel spend at least three days in a learning center talking to students

> on a first-hand basis. Especially, the course developers before a new course is designed or developed. I personally feel that we have in many instances underestimated the sophistication of our learners (e.g., TV component in Accounting did not go over very well with our adult learners).

Another staff member observes that:

> People find the SUN delivery system very appealing, but they want a wide range of offerings that are not built around time schedules, (such as registration procedures and television programs, or traditional degree granting programs). They want greater control over the pace at which they proceed through a course; and they need the capability of pursuing degrees through a mixture of institutions, courses, and experiences. Not all expectations involve credit offerings. Nor do all service requests involve the actual physical use of the learning center. Thus enhancing the importance of the telephone and personal contacts.

Another comment dealt with learner goals and the outcomes from SUN courses:

> For SUN staff to specify goals for learners is inconsistent with out overall program. We emphasize flexibility and adaptation to individual learners and the reasons why learners are taking the course are varied ("individual differences"). Perhaps, one of the most valid questions pertaining to the student evaluations of the course might be: Did you (student) personally feel you got your"money's worth" out of the course, or did you feel gyped? Perhaps, translate the questionnaire statements into their (students') experiential level more.

As courses are added to the SUN curriculum, it is recommended that:

> As new courses are added, the "publicity campaign" for them should take into consideration that the Omaha World-Herald is not widely read state-wide, and that only a limited audience reads educational news. If press releases are sent to small town newspapers, it would help if some local flavor was included. If SUN central is unable to individualize news releases this much, perhaps the basic information for a news release could be sent to the learning center and the coordinator could assume the responsibility for localizing the news releases and then sending it out from the center. If that happens, then I do not think SUN central should also send out releases

> to the same newspaper. It does without saying that with small newspapers, TV, and radio, a release from Lincoln takes a backseat to local releases.

At times learning center staff apparently are required to make presentations and attend conferences. With this in mind, the following is given:

> We are trying to build a collection of slides that we can use in making public presentations promoting the SUN program, and that will also include a localized flavor. Thus we want to mix slides of SUN central operations with shots from our center and from individual towns in the area. This is an expensive process and we could use some assistance with film mailers. Perhaps SUN central could do some bulk buying and make this material more economically accessible to us. A slide projector is also needed.
>
> In addition, we are frequently called upon to participate in activities where we have a booth to exhibit our program that is self-explanatory and appealing. In the future, we intend to use the county fairs, conventions, etc., as a medium for promoting the SUN program. A self-contained portable exhibit piece would be most useful. Perhaps the art department at SUN central could design something for us. It would also be helpful if we had direct access to the services of the graphic arts department for such things as posters, signs, etc. that again carry the localized flavor.

The following caveat is offered through another learning center staff comment:

> As pressures continue to mount on SUN central to provide additional course offerings, I am concerned that there may be a movement to acquire courses wily-nily, without regard for their actual usefulness, their academic respectability, or their availability from local educational institutions. How much flexibility and adaptability are being built into the SUN program system? Who is responsible for initiating, implementing, and evaluating unique problem solving ideas for meeting the educational needs of the future for the adult community? Will SUN become more traditional as it matures? Will the efforts of the research and evaluation component result in an historical perspective of SUN, or as a model for the future? Are learning centers fulfilling their functions, and how can they be improved? Is any thought being given to how SUN can continue its personalized approach if it expands into a multiplicity of course offerings, educational experiences, and services? Will

it still be possible, for example, for a student to visit with his instructor if SUN does offer its projected 55 courses? Will a learning center have the capacity to continue to act as an ombudsman and facilitator for the students in its service area? Can SUN pay for tutors to function in the learning centers?

Finally, the following is offered:

Perhaps SUN central is unable to do much thinking in terms of the long range consequences of SUN, but I have one final concern. As staff members, we freely talk about our expectations for SUN and the learning centers, but what about our public whose expectations have been raised by the mere existence of SUN? Maybe SUN has matured to the point where its next step should be a more intensive concentration on the expectations of the people.

Another local aspiration is for a needs assessment survey of the area for the kind and types of courses, experiences, and services that are wanted by the general public, and special interest groups such as business, industry, and the professions.

Staff Training and Development Recommendations

The third part of the Questionnaire requested learning center staff to evaluate the training and development activities held for them and to recommend future activities for their professional growth. Following the same format as the second part of the Questionnaire, staff completed their response to the question in essay form. Comments by learning center staff will be reported in a similar manner.

1. The initial week-long seminar held for the orientation of learning center staff. Sentiments expressed by learning center staff toward the week-long orientation seminar were both positive and negative. On the positive side, one respondent said this:

> There is really nothing that could replace the week-long seminar for new people coming to SUN. This was most important and very helpful. I do feel now, since we do have centers in operation, that a portion of the seminar could be devoted to learning centers, where information could be given to persons that are opening new centers. I think we have learned many things that would benefit new center personnel.

Another respondent gave a similar point of view:

> I found the initial week long seminar to be most useful. It was important to know the people who had put together the SUN program and to learn of their philosophies and commitments.

The value to learning center staff of meeting other people in the SUN program at the initial seminar was commented on several times. For example,

> The value of the initial week-long seminar for me was in meeting the other people who would be in the learning centers, meeting key people at SUN Central, and having the SUN program explained from several different angles. I especially appreciated meeting the content people and seeing the accounting component. The result was that I left feeling that I was part of a "team" and that I had a clearer understanding of the concept of SUN.

And,

> One unplanned but beneficial aspect of the week-long conference was the chance to meet and socialize with other Learning Center people and the SUN Central staff. The friendship and familiarity brought about is very beneficial as to attitudes and feeling part of an organization.

Others evaluated the seminar for its background information. One respondent said it this way:

> The initial week-long seminar was necessary. To open a center without knowing the history of SUN and the people that work in SUN Central would be as satisfying as opening a dry cleaners. It could have been better, but it was not a failure.

Another learning center staffer reported a similar viewpoint:

> At the week-long seminar, orientation to the history and organization of the SUN project was functional.

And, a third respondent had a similar comment:

> At the week-long seminar in Lincoln, the history, philosophy and general goals of SUN were clearly stated. Great chance to meet other staff members.

However, not all learning center staff felt so positive about the seminar.

For example,

> As with everything of this type, some parts were great, others poor. We needed the background information (history, research to date, info on course construction, etc.). However, I felt we received no actual training--if any were possible in such a new situation. It served the purpose of arousing enthusiasm but provided us with no new skills.
>
> From the purely technical point of view, each day's session at the week-long seminar was too long and often drug out. Eight hours in an office is one thing, but 8 hours in one room in one chair doing nothing but listening to sometimes not fascinating things is quite another. Anything in the late afternoon was often wasted merely because I had reached my saturation point.

Another respondent put it this way:

> Regarding the week-long seminar, many parts were good, some not. Sessions were too long.

Several suggestions were given for the improvement of future orientation seminars:

> It would have been helpful if we could have had a copy of the big blue notebook about the SUN operation in Nebraska before we went to the seminar. We went into the seminar pretty cold, and came out staggered by the amount of information presented. Perhaps a shorter session and then another one after we had been out in the field about a month would have been beneficial.

> I wish now that the coordinators could have attended a short seminar before they had to select their staff assistants. The idea was good to include the assistants, but maybe that could come after the coordinators know more about what is going on.

> At the time, I was not particularly interested in the people from Empire State. Now that we have been in the field, I would like to hear from them again.

Finally, one learning center staff had this to report:

> I left the seminar really psyched up about SUN and all the wonderful things it was going to accomplish. I was impressed with the quality of people associated with SUN.

2. The one-day miniconference. About a month after the initial orientation seminar, learning center staff again came to Lincoln for what was called a "miniconference." The purpose of the miniconference ostensibly was to deal with practical concerns and problems which learning center staff encountered during the first few weeks on the job. Generally, comments from learning center staff about the conference were negative. For example,

> When the miniconference rolled around, I assumed that we now knew a little of what our LC could and would do, we would get into actuall training and informative procedures. Yet pep talk seemed to be the order of the day. And we already had the pep. We just weren't always sure how to channel it. I felt this meeting was worthless especially in contrast to the cost of having the LC staffs come to Lincoln. One day is so

> hectic. We learned nothing that couldn't have been told to us in a letter. All discussions were totally non-confidential to the point that we feel that we dare not say or express certain feelings for fear that we be criticized. I shouldn't say "we"--I am merely speaking for myself and what I thought I observed from the others. Criticism is not necessarily negative--I feel that it was meant to be constructive. Even from a selfish standpoint, we all want the LC's to work out for the best. And minor problems concern us, since these can be the things that get you down.

Another comment was very blunt:

> The one-day miniconference had no value.
>
> More time should be spent with actual situations. (Go there--don't sit around a table and talk about it.)

As was a third comment:

> The one-day miniconference was a waste of time. Needed more opportunity for learning center staff to talk and compare "notes" and less structured input from SUN Central.

Another learning center staff put it this way:

> I would like to hear some definite <u>closure</u> on some solutions to problems (I feel like I'm left hanging up in the air as to how exactly I'm supposed to handle a particular problem). Suggest a written memorandum stating SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) for this and that problems be sent to learning centers and kept on file.

However, some did find value in the miniconference. For example,

> The one-day miniconference was weak. The time spent with Larry Brown and the prototype testing discussion was the high point for me. The more we know about what is going in Lincoln, the better.

and,

> At the one-day miniconference, the specific <u>agenda</u> in advance, was a good idea (gave us time to think about some of the items).

Finally, two respondents found motivational value in the miniconference:

> I feel the one-day miniconference to be of value in that any waning of our enthusiasm, in light of the realities of the implementation of the SUN concept, was dispelled and we received positive reinforcement of the worth of our efforts.

and,

> The miniconference served the functions of re-charging our batteries for SUN and I enjoyed seeing and talking with the other coordinators. I found the discussion on tests the most useful for my information needs. I could have profited from more open discussion on the problems that were being encountered at the learning centers, and how they were trying to be solved.

3. The Allen Tough Conference on "Adult Learning Modes and Models."

On October 28-29, 1974, the Adult and Continuing Education Department of UNL hosted a conference on adult learning. The learning center coordinators attended the conference. The main thrust of the Conference was the reporting and discussion of research by Allen Tough of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Several small group sessions were held to discuss implications of Tough's research for adult and continuing education.

One learning center coordinator reported these feelings about the conference:

> As far as I am concerned, the Allen Tough conference was the most beneficial meeting I have ever attended. The reason is that what he had to say came at a time when I was ready to hear it. I had been out in the field long enough to become aware of my limitations and my frustrations in being involved in the implementation of a new program and by my entry into a new career. I came back from that conference with a clearer idea of what adult education is all about and how I could better contribute to the developing role of our learning center. Hearing Tough and visiting with other adult educators helped me focus in on my responsibilities. Obviously, then, I would welcome the opportunity to participate in other conferences in the future. Anything that can assist in appreciating the needs of adult learners would be helpful.

Another coordinator had this to say:

> Any exposure that we can involve ourselves with, dealing with adult learning, continuing education, educational experiences of adults, would be of interest and help to us. The conference with Tough was good. More exposure of this nature would help all of us.

A third coordinator put it this way:

> The person who decided that we should attend events like the Allen Tough conference is my kind of person. It is this kind of topic that I feel is important to me. I was not very impressed by Allen Tough as I did not feel he had enough to offer to spend that much time. However, I would drive to Lincoln again if he comes back for the topic of the conference is all important to me.

However, one coordinator reported a different evaluation of the Tough conference:

> At the Allen Tough conference, no emphasis was placed upon how adults learn and if they differ from anyone else at all. The research that was presented was descriptive and not of any great significance.
>
> Further activities like the Allen Tough conference should not be a priority.

Although assistants at the learning centers did not attend the Conference, two made comments:

> As I did not attend the Allen Tough conference, I am unable to respond to its relevance to me. From the brief amount of literature I did read, though, I did discover that Dr. Tough's publications could afford me some valuable information on the adult learner. As of yet, I have been unable to find any of his books in our area and perhaps SUN Central could assist me. I would very much like to attend any similar conferences when it is possible.

and,

> The Allen Tough conference write-up was personally interesting and informative to me, as were the write-ups from R&E (functional to my job from a macroscopic perspective). I would welcome exposure to other similar opportunities.

4. Recommendations for future learning center staff training and development activities. With regard to future training and development activities, learning center staff had several recommendations. Perhaps one respondent expressed the group sentiment:

> In all areas of adult education, I feel that I would like to expand my knowledge. Each day I become more aware of my ignorance and try to find answers to my many questions.

One specific area commented on was knowledge about educational opportunities other than SUN offerings. One respondent said:

> I think that we need continued expansion of knowledge relative to other opportunities available for adult learning.

Another respondent made similar recommendations:

> I would like to know more about other specific continuing education programs in our area. We cannot really afford the time to interview each director of a program, but perhaps one of the SUN Central staff members could do this and write up a report concerning individual programs for the benefit of future learning center staff members. This vital information would help us to fulfill our counseling function (in regards to postsecondary opportunities) more adequately. I would suggest providing a list of specific continuing education directors and phone numbers within various institutions across the state and within our own area (to be used for student referals to other programs).

As did a third respondent,

> Other things I would like would be having people from other institutions meet with us and tell us about their programs (that is, institutions in Nebraska, not New York).

Increasing the competencies of an adult educator is stressed in the following comment:

> Continuing education continues to be my number one priority for expanding my talents and skills. Access to good bibliographic sources would be most helpful. I would like to see SUN Central make arrangements for use of materials from Love library and to provide for libraries in the center. At this point, my major concern is learning and then applying what I have learned. Consequently, I honestly do not know what my major strengths are in terms of adult education. I know that I enjoy working with people and that I have a passionate belief in the power of education. For the most part what I need now is time to develop as an adult educator, and to become a more effective leader for staff assistants by better interpreting and implementing the functions of the center.

One learning center staff reported two specific areas for improvement:

> Improvement is desired in identifying adult needs and skills in learning assessment and goal setting.
>
> Improvement is desired in recognition of need and help in remedial skills.

Another specific suggestion is contained in the following comment:

> I would suggest some short program on types of financial aid and explanation as to how these should be handled.

Finally, means available for in-house communications is commented on:

> The Staff Newsletter is a good idea--keeps me informed as to what SUN Central is up to. (I look forward to the jokes) - parentheses are <u>not</u> in reference to preceding part of statement. Ha!

5. <u>Learning Center staff as trainers</u>. Three members of the learning center team commented on skills and talents which they could offer for the training of other learning center staff. One had this to say:

> Relating practical field experiences to others would be a contribution I could make in the training of other learning center staff members.

Another made a similar comment:

> As for expertise in training other learning center staff, I feel that mine lies in relating to them my experience in the development of our center and my evolving role as staff assistant.

And, a third elaborated on the same theme:

> Our expertise? The most functional thing we could do is to sit down and talk with future learning center staff and let them know what they might expect (on a a priori basis) from students in our particular area. We could go over some of the items in our activities log with them.

In closing this section of the paper, insight into the rewards of being a learning center staff is shown in the following comment:

> The SUN project is an excellent opportunity for adult learners and most of them have been quite pleased with the program which, in turn, pleases me a great deal and makes my job a rewarding one.

Conclusions from the Findings

Prior to synthesizing the substantive findings of the study, it is important to note some of the important methodological limitations. First, responses to the quantified items on the questionnaire are reported in group or "normative" fashion. As demonstrated in the data, individual responses to a given item may vary considerably from the group or average response. Therefore, one limitation of the study is the lack of confidence one can hold that the group findings are representative of any one individual respondent.

A second limitation of the study is the assumption that all respondents had the same referent for a given item. For example, when responding to Item #1 on the Questionnaire ("To what extent do you think that learning centers should perform the following services:"), to what extent were the preferences of "significant others" influential in the priority ratings? Or, another example, in the perceptions of important activities, who served as the reference for the SUN Administration? the Executive Director? the Provost? the Associate Provost? the Dean? the Director of Student Services? the Director of Academic Services?

A third limitation of the study is that the findings are time- and condition-bound. In large part, the data generated in the study refer to perceptions, preferences, attitudes, and sentiments. Some may refer to these as "soft" data, which over time can be expected to change, perhaps drastically. The SUN program was in its early formative stage when the data for this study was collected. The data themselves are indicators of an evolving program. Nevertheless, the findings should be viewed as important "base-line" data which have not only historical significance, but also contain a stimulus for corrective action.

Given these limitations, what follows is a summary of the findings from the study.

Learning center staff report that they perform a wide range of activities for the SUN program. For purposes of defining the current role of learning centers in the SUN program, the activities of learning center staff can be arranged within three functions: a course-related function, a clearinghouse function, and a management function.

Perhaps most of the current activities of learning center staff, as a group, relate to course activities. Four of the seven most frequently performed activities reported by learning center staff were: ensuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center; keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition; recruiting students in the local area; and, assisting students with the use of all materials in the center. Other course-related activities performed by learning center staff, in order of decreasing frequency, include: assisting students with course and general delivery problems, working to find additional ways to personalize and individualize the SUN instructional process, supervising the achievement assessment of all students coming to the center, and arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together.

A second set of activities performed by learning center staff relate to what may be termed a "clearinghouse function." These activities include, in order of decreasing frequency: advising students who contact the center by telephone, keeping informed on all educational programs to meet individual needs, counseling students visiting the center, serving as a learning consultant for the center, and seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional tutors or counselors.

A third function which can be defined for learning centers is management of activities (a) within the learning centers and (b) between the learning centers and other agencies. Within learning centers, staff maintain pertinent records on all students in their areas, operate and oversee the maintenance of all

technical equipment, engage in clerial-office procedures, and provide the center with library materials. Between the learning center and other agencies, staff engage in relating to the local community and otherwise serving as a local public relations officer for SUN, serving as a liaison between SUN and "host" institution, representing SUN to the educational institutions in the area, serving as a liaison between SUN and other surrounding institutions, and arranging social events.

To what extent is there agreement between the SUN administration and learning center staff on the importance of various learning center activities? As a group, learning center staff perceive the SUN administration to stress course-related activities to a greater extent than "clearinghouse" or management activities. Learning center staff, as a group, would prefer that more importance be attached to the clearinghouse function when compared with the course-related function of learning centers. For example, the most highly preferred services of learning centers by the staff were (1) referring students for credit by examination, and (2) directing students into educational or training opportunities not offered by SUN. The SUN administration and learning center staff are in apparent agreement that management activities should be the third area of importance.

To what extent are learning center staff equipped to do their job? Before this question can be answered, it is necessary to ask two related questions:

What job was learning center staff expected to do?

and,

How have the job expectations of learning center staff changed?

The comments of learning center staff on Part II of the Questionnaire are revealing. As a group, learning center staff represented themselves as highly optimistic and idealistic on joining the SUN program. The expectations of learning center staff, for the most part, were that learning centers had a

central place in the SUN program; that large numbers of students would desire counseling, advising, and other services of learning centers; that learning centers would help elevate the SUN program to a high level of visibility in adult education in the state; and, that a high degree of personal satisfaction and professional growth was obtainable as learning center staff. What learning center staff reportedly found in reality was that students at times chose to use the toll-free telephone line to SUN faculty and administration, thereby not availing themselves of the learning center; that learning centers were viewed in strategic locations as an alternate, supplementary resource in the SUN program; that fewer students contacted learning centers than expected; and, that procedural and coordination problems marked the early weeks of learning center operations. While some learning center staff recognized a great distance between the beginnings of a new program and the realization of its goals, patience and continued optimism was expressed for the evolving program. All learning center staff, to some extent, revised their initial job expectations.

Given the experimental nature of the SUN program, several factors, then, impinge on the effectiveness of learning center staff. One factor is the current level of capability exhibited by learning center staff. It appears that learning center staff desire additional competencies (knowledge, skills, sensitivities) in the following areas:

1. Competencies related to the course-related function of learning centers
   a. identifying and referring individuals in need of remedial or study skills.
   b. employing instructional technologies and materials.
   c. assisting individuals in learning assessment and goal setting.

2. Competencies related to the clearinghouse function of learning centers
   a. counseling and testing individuals, e.g. through CLEP.
   b. identifying and referring adults to learning opportunities in the community.
   c. evaluation of postsecondary educational objectives and programs.
   d. identifying specific resources in other postsecondary programs in adult and continuing education.

3. Competencies related to the intra-agency management function of learning centers
   a. analyzing and applying principles of participative management.
   b. leadership for learning centers and staff assistants.
   c. financial aid available to students.

4. Competencies related to the inter-agency management function of learning centers
   a. public speaking.
   b. explaining existing higher education opportunities to the public.
   c. continuing education, open learning.

A second factor impinging on the effectiveness of learning center staff is the intended role of coordinators and assistants in relationship to the SUN administration and faculty. Learning center staff report, almost unanimously, that they felt support from the SUN administration, other staff, and faculty. However, the role identity of assistants, as well as coordinators, was not clear to learning center staff. For example, is the main job of an assistant that of a secretary-clerk or that of a professional educator? Comments by learning center staff elaborate on this point.

A third factor affecting the jobs of learning center staff is agreement as to how effectiveness is to be defined, both qualitatively and quantitatively. At the present time, it appears that learning center staff lack clear guidelines as to how their job is evaluated or where they should place priority for the expenditure of resources.

A fourth factor impinging on the effectiveness of learning center staff is the problem of establishing a new enterprise like a SUN learning center. Procedural and coordination problems have been encountered during the first four months of learning center operations.

A fifth factor affecting learning center staff is the organizational relationship of SUN to UMA. Between the lines of comments made by learning center staff, one gets the impression that there exists concern for the actual and

potential relationship of SUN and its learning centers to UMA. For example, to what extent will UMA provide resources to SUN and its learning centers for the continued development of open learning in Nebraska? Also, to what extent will UMA direct the activities of SUN and its learning centers in Nebraska?

Finally, a sixth factor to be noted here as impinging on the effectiveness of learning center staff is the organizational relationship of SUN to UNL and other institutions in the state. Is SUN a fourth institution in the University of Nebraska system? Where will SUN eventually get its financial support? How does SUN differ from other adult and continuing education programs. Is SUN and its learning centers duplicating services and clientele of existing programs? If so, can SUN legitimate its existence? How will the organization dilemma be resolved?

Recommendations for Action

One of the hallmarks in the evolution of a postsecondary, open learning model in Nebraska was, in October of 1974, the enrollment of learners in the first SUN courses. The impact of this development necessitated our coming to grips with the operation of four learning centers in the state. Since August, 1974, the function of these centers has tested the best thinking of SUN staff. Caught up in the daily operation of course development and routine delivery problems oftentimes prohibits a systematic consideration of the issues related to learning centers. Time and limited experience now enables us to begin to identify issues critical to the delivery of educational services through SUN to Nebraskans and related strategies for dealing with these issues.

The SUN delivery system consists of more than learning centers, of course. One of the original intents of SUN was to make available educational opportunities to people in their homes. Some learners may thus choose not to use learning centers. The purpose of this section of this paper, however, is to focus on

what we have identified as eight recommendations for action related to learning centers for 1975. These recommendations derive both from observations on the actual operation of learning centers thus far, and from expectations held for learning centers by their staff and administration. These recommendations constitute basic directions for an evaluation of at least the learning center aspects of SUN delivery.

Recommendation #1: Learning centers should serve a "clearinghouse" function as well as course-related and management functions. The early conception of a learning center was, more or less, that of a media library which would house instructional resources for voluntary student use. That conception has evolved, at least in the mind of learning center staff, to one in which learning centers are active in course-related as well as program management and clearinghouse activities. The clearinghouse function has been quite unclear up to this point. However, learning center staff recognize that (a) an abundance of learning opportunities already exist for adults in their communities, (b) adults require help to assess their personal goals and educational experiences which they desire, and (c) someone should be helping to identify and refer adults to learning opportunities which are likely to meet expressed interests. The above are three components of what is referred to here as the clearinghouse function.

In the near future, and primarily because of inevitable funding issues, the SUN program is likely to require both state support and increased student enrollments in offered courses. These conditions will create stress in at least two respects. On the one hand, SUN probably will be competing with other post-secondary institutions in the state for financial support. To some institutions, SUN will probably be a threat to their funding base as well as the "market" which existing instititutions serve. It would be to SUN's advantage in seeking state funding if it could demonstrate (a) that it is offering a set of services

not currently offered through existing programs, (b) that it is serving a clientele not currently served through existing programs, (c) that benefits accrue to other programs as a result of SUN's operation, and/or (d) that definite individual and community benefits result from SUN. SUN can distinguish itself in those four respects through the service it performs related to a clearinghouse function. On the other hand, a significant amount of time and energy of learning center staff may be required for student recruitment and registration if numbers of students enrolled in SUN courses becomes critical. In this case, someone probably will need to choose which activities assume priority, student recruitment and registration in courses or counseling and advising students of the many opportunities available to them other than SUN courses. The old dilemma of the numbers game is apparent here.

Given these two conditions, and the potential stress for learning center staff, it is recommended that a commitment be made to support learning center staff in their clearinghouse function and that student recruitment and registration not dominate their energies. Furthermore, it is recommended that learning center staff document their clearinghouse activities such that the impact on individuals and communities can be assessed and reported.

Recommendation #2: Specific training experiences should be planned and implemented for learning center staff. One of the immediate support requirements for learning center staff is continued training and development in strategic areas of the adult educator. It is recommended that an appropriate amount of resources, including learning center staff time and travel expenses, be earmarked for at least three of the following competency areas:

1. assisting individuals in assessing their learning and setting goals which are reasonable and obtainable;
2. counseling individuals for vocational and avocational decisions;

3. evaluating educational and training opportunities available in the community;

4. assessing the educational and training interests of segments of the adults in the community;

5. identifying and referring individuals in need of remedial or study skills;

6. the CLEP testing program;

7. leadership for administering an adult, open learning program in the community;

8. preparation of programs to inform the public and institutions of the SUN program, learning centers and their functions, the planning of lifelong learning, etc.

9. continuing education in the state of Nebraska, program opportunities, and the SUN program.

In addition to providing training and development opportunities for learning center staff, an evaluation and follow-up of these activities should be undertaken. One focus for this evaluation would be the impact of the activity on the expectations and performances of learning center staff.

Recommendation #3: The continuation and/or expansion of learning centers should be conditioned by an examination of the role and effectiveness of present learning centers. Of critical importance to the continuation, modification, or expansion of learning centers is an evaluation of the role and effectiveness of the present learning centers. During calendar year 1974, a beginning data base was generated to address some of the topics related to this recommendation. Extended data for addressing these topics should be available during 1975.

Table 4 summarizes the topics and sources of information related to this recommendation. The topics are organized under four headings: research, staff development, management, and organizational. The sources of data are identified for both 1974 and 1975.

Table 4

A Summary of the Topics and Data Related to an Evaluation of the Role and Effectiveness of Learning Centers

TOPIC AREA/QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	
	1974 Data	1975 Data
A. Research		
1. What kind of learners use learning centers? a. learners with less than a college education? b. learners who live within a 20 mile radius of the learning center? c. learners who are enrolled in more than one course offered through SUN? d. learners who take SUN courses for credit? e. learners who are not enrolled in SUN courses?	Registration Form Logs in learning centers	Registration Form Logs in learning centers
2. When compared with learners who do not use learning centers (or less frequently so), do learners who use learning centers (or more frequently so): a. withdraw less frequently from courses? b. achieve more? c. express more satisfaction with a course? d. more frequently enroll in a second course? e. more frequently enroll in educational offerings outside of SUN?	Registration Form Unit test data End of course evaluation form SUN Central records Logs in learning centers	Registration Form Unit test data End of course evaluation form SUN Central records Logs in learning centers Interviews with students
3. What are the needs of individual learners which learning centers are attempting to meet, and how effective are learning centers in meeting those needs? Do learning centers have an adverse effect on learners, e.g., frustration at knowing learning center staff do not tutor or teach?	Telephone Survey Unit Evaluation Form End of course evaluation form Logs in learning centers	Telephone Survey Unit Evaluation Form End of course evaluation form Logs in learning centers Interviews with learning center staff Interviews with students

Table 4 (cont.)

TOPIC AREA/QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	
	1974 Data	1975 Data
B. Staff Development		
1. What knowledge and skills are needed by learning center staff, and what training is required for new and continuing staff?	Staff Development Questionnaire Logs in learning centers	Interviews with learning center staff Logs in learning centers Literature and site-visits of other open learning programs with learning centers
2. What means of learning center staff evaluation exist, and in what manner are evaluative data used to help staff do their jobs well? What are the criteria for evaluating learning center staff effectiveness?		Interviews with learning center staff, faculty, and administration; student evaluations of learning center staff
C. Management		
1. What activities do learning center staff perform?	Staff Development Questionnaire Learning center logs	Learning center logs
2. Do learning center staff perform a clearinghouse function, i.e., linking learners with the various opportunities for learning? If so, in what ways? Does the learning center exist primarily for the student enrolled in SUN courses?	Staff Development Questionnaire Learning center logs	Interviews with learning center staff Learning center logs
3. For what reasons do learners use learning centers? a. for meeting with faculty? b. for academic or vacational counseling? c. for peer contact? d. for testing? e. for previewing/reviewing videotapes? f. for reading materials? g. for listening to audiocassettes?	Logs in learning centers Telephone survey	Logs in learning centers Telephone survey Interviews with students

Table 4 (cont.)

TOPIC AREA/QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	
	1974 Data	1975 Data
4. What hours are learning centers accessible to students and do the available hours meet students' schedules? Do students use the learning center if open given hours?	Student survey	Student Survey
5. How frequently do faculty visit the learning center and are regularly scheduled visitations required?	Learning center logs	Learning center logs Interviews with faculty, staff, and students
6. What is the need for learning center staff to meet with students outside the immediate area of the learning center?		Interviews with staff and students
D. Organizational		
1. What is the relationship between learning center and central office staff?	Staff Development Questionnaire	Interviews with staff and administration
2. What alternative staffing patterns have been considered for learning centers? a. What is the rationale for the present staffing pattern? b. How well has the present staffing pattern worked? c. What changes in staffing should be made for future learning centers and what experimentation is possible?		Interviews with staff and administration
3. What facilities, furniture, equipment, and materials: a. make a learning center conducive to learner use? b. make a learning center conducive to staff work?	Staff Development Questionnaire	Interviews with staff, administration and students
4. Do students view learning centers as a regular campus, and if so, does that influence their use of learning centers?		Interviews with students

Recommendation #4: The organizational relationship of SUN and UMA should be carefully articulated. What may have been organizational pitfalls during the evolution of SUN have the potential of exaggeration with the development of the UMA consortium. The Nebraska Delivery System (as well as those in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri) are conceived of as central to the effective operation of UMA. As users of UMA products and services--and as interpreters of learner interests--state delivery systems have the responsibility of relating to the various facets of UMA. This relationship can be more than the exchange of information.

One of the ways in which UMA/SUN organizational relationship can be articulated is to adopt a team approach to particular problems. By identifying problems that cut across UMA/SUN and by employing the talented viewpoints of varied individuals, representative teams with rotating leadership and extinguishable upon completion of the task could innervate the UMA/SUN organizational relationship.

Beginning early 1975, it is recommended that at least one joint UMA/SUN team be formed from staff in areas such as: course acquisition instructional design, research and evaluation, production services, public information, UMA administration, SUN administration, SUN faculty, and learning center staff. The purpose of forming the team would be to address one or more of the following problems:

Market surveys for identifying areas of need for educational experiences that do not exist for specific target population (like registered nurses or pesticide operators), and estimates of the number and judged quality of courses required.

Student withdrawals from courses, reasons for them, and remedial action desireable.

Consulting services which UMA/SUN could provide to existing programs for the purpose of helping existing programs to sharpen their resources and goals.

Sharing and comparing information with other institutions like WICHE, Empire State, and the British Open University.

Implication of computer assisted instruction for UMA/SUN, and its potential impact on learning centers and learners.

Assessment of courses to be acquired, in terms of audience, potential effectiveness, and long-range cost implications.

Feasibility of the systematic use of cost and effectiveness data in staff decisions.

Baseline study of the impact of UMA/SUN on existing institutions in the State of Nebraska, including impact on student enrollments, faculty, programs, and services.

Baseline study of the impact of UMA/SUN on communities in the State of Nebraska.

Study to project the need for postsecondary education in the State of Nebraska, including the identification of where existing programs and available resources are in relation to that need, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

Development of a plan for accomplishing the self-sufficiency of UMA/SUN after the five year development period, including what assumptions are made in the plan.

Recommendation #5: The relationship of SUN to existing state "outreach" programs should be discussed and an appropriate strategy for implementation should be adopted. Of critical importance during 1975 is that the relationship of SUN to other adult and continuing programs in the state be examined carefully. At the present time, SUN is neither a legitimately recognized fourth institution in the University of Nebraska system nor a working part of UNL. SUN at the present time is an experimental "project" with outside funding. It is doubtful whether SUN can continue to hold all options open and to be all things to all people. Rather, three viable alternatives should be considered and then acted upon. First, SUN may become an arm of the Department of Continuing Education at UNL. In this sense, SUN would be on a collegial relationship with UNL Extension. Second, SUN may become a program with UNL at the Vice-Chancellor level that includes UNL Extension and the Department of Adult and

Continuing Education. Third, SUN may become part of a University system program which includes UNO Extension, UNL Extension, and the Adult and Continuing Education programs. The implications and potential impact for SUN may be quite different under the three organizational arrangements.

Two activities, in particular, are recommended for 1975. First, the Scottsbluff Learning Center--where the UNL Extension Division and SUN are working cooperatively--could serve as a trial effort for other learning centers. In this regard, it is proposed that the Scottsbluff learning center undertake a series of activities which will identify community interest for educational experiences which UNL Extension, SUN, or some existing program can meet. Staff at other learning centers could both visit and participate in these activities.

Second, it is proposed that both learning center and SUN administration engage in an active identification and cataloging of learning experiences available in the communities of the state. In this regard, the UNL Extension Division, as well as the Adult and Continuing Education Program, could be invited to participate.

Recommendation #6: Experimentation with learning centers should be encouraged and supported. The present and future operation of learning centers has the potential for exciting experimentation. Planning for life-long education, community-based learning projects, and the impact of learning centers on communities are but a few of the issues that could be presented to agencies for outside funding. The welding of claims made for the egalitarian educational movement and the actualization of this movement in real settings could elicit favorable responses to funding proposals. It is recommended that a feasibility study be commenced during 1975 which would identify one of more communities in Nebraska interested in establishing its own learning center. A proposal could be drafted for submission to an appropriate funding agency to support one or

more community efforts to establish a learning center. Furthermore, present learning center staff should be encouraged to initiate and seek support for innovative efforts in their areas.

Recommendation #7: If present learning centers are continued, or new learning centers initiated, learning center staff recommendations should be carefully considered as strategic input. Findings from this study include of this report includes numerous recommendations by learning center staff for (a) dealing with problems already encountered through the operations of the four existing learning centers, and (b) improving the SUN program and its learning centers. In that the recommendations by learning center staff have been reported elsewhere, a summary of those recommendations will not be given here. Those recommendations, however, should be given serious consideration in present and future deliberations about learning centers and the SUN program.

Recommendation #8: The results from the "Learning Center Staff Development Questionnaire" should be promptly followed-up with learning center staff, SUN administration and faculty, and UMA administration and staff. One of the most impressive aspects of the Questionnaire as completed by learning center staff was the extent of commitment, capability, and team work exemplified by learning center staff. This amount of creative talent and potentially productive energy should not be taken lightly. Rather, the good faith and courage demonstrated by learning center staff should be reinforced and assisted towards higher levels of performance. One step in that direction would be to promptly follow-up with learning center staff on how their recommendations are being considered and the action which will be taken as a result of their input. Furthermore, the SUN administration and faculty--as well as the UMA administration and staff--should carefully consider the learning centers and their staff and how the various functions can be most effectively supported. Many of the issues which learning center staff confront are the strategic issues for SUN and UMA.

Epilogue

A draft of this report was discussed on January 30, 1975, at a joint meeting of the SUN Administration, learning center coordinators, and a staff member from the Office of Research and Evaluation. One outgrowth of that meeting was that individuals accepted responsibility for addressing the recommendations of the report. It was decided that:

> Both the SUN administration and learning center coordinators would accept responsibility for Recommendation #5 (the relationship of SUN to existing state "outreach" programs should be discussed and an appropriate strategy for implementation should be adapted).
>
> Learning center coordinators and the SUN administration, in conjunction with the Office of Research and Evaluation, would work toward Recommendation #4 (the organizational relationship of SUN and UMA should be carefully articulated), through efforts involving "market surveys."
>
> The SUN administration would, in conjunction with learning center coordinators, address Recommendation #1 (learning centers should serve a "clearinghouse" function as well as course-related and management function), Recommendation #2 (specific training experiences should be planned and implemented for learning center staff), and Recommendation #8 (the results from the "Learning Center Staff Development Questionnaire" should be promptly followed-up with learning center staff, SUN administration and faculty, and UMA administration and staff).
>
> The Office of Research and Evaluation would assist the SUN administration and learning center coordinators with Recommendation #3 (the continuation and/or expansion of learning centers should be conditioned by an examination of the role and effectiveness of present learning centers).
>
> Learning center coordinators would be assisted by the SUN administration and the Office of Research and Evaluation in Recommendation #6 (experimentation with learning centers should be encouraged and supported).
>
> The SUN administration would implement Recommendation #7 (if present learning centers are continued, or new learning centers initiated, learning center staff recommendations should be carefully considered as strategic input).

Memorandum from Carol Williamson, SUN Associate Director for Academic Services to Learning Center Staff, other SUN Administrators, and UMA Research and Evaluation Office, February 5, 1975

"Recommendations" addressed in terms of specific actions possible and desirable on the part of Learning Center staff and/or SUN administration. Recommendations discussed below in the order they appear in the report.

Expected that at future SUN meetings reports will be given on each recommendation. Written progress reports by end of March.

Recommendation 1. Learning Centers should serve a "clearinghouse" function as well as course-related and management functions.

All Coordinators will continue to explore the existing educational opportunities in their region as well as to refer individuals to such opportunities. SUN Administration will work with Coordinators on establishing understanding and good working relations with existing institutions.

Actions

1. Monthly log will be revised for recording referrals and the outcome of referrals.

2. Don will set up discussion with METRO about use of their mobile van and ways SUN could tie into that use. Will also continue to explore ways SUN Learning Centers can supplement NETCHE offerings, e.g., having tapes of programs available in centers. SUN Administration will help with both.

3. Judy will continue to work with institutions on ways reciprocal relations can be increased. NETCHE tape use in center is possibility here also. SUN Administration will assist.

4. Paul will do more traveling in his area. For example, when SUN faculty visit Kearney, Paul can take state car for the day. Also will attempt to tie in with Kearney teacher supervisor trips. Can plan limited travel on SUN budget. SUN Administration will assist.

5. Curt will continue to build relations with UNL Extension. In particular he and Carol will meet with representatives of Extension to explore suggestion that Extension use centers to house some of their course-related materials, as well as how Extension handles testing. Curt will report progress to all Coordinators.

6. All will continue to look for ways to hold group discussions with public SUN has been unsuccessful in reaching. Will always be cataloguing reference sources and looking for channels thru which to meet educational needs.

7. SUN Delivery must investigate the alternatives to the present decentralized testing pattern. Also, begin to rethink the role and function of staff assistants.

Recommendation 2. Specific training experiences should be planned and implemented for learning center staff.

Action

Judy and Carol will take primary responsibility for planning. Will work on March meeting for coordinators, planning coordinators from UMA states, and other appropriate individuals to meet with University For Man (Kansas) representatives. Some preliminary work has been done on this meeting. Might be wise to hold meeting in Kansas. This meeting holds potential for addressing competency areas of discovering educational and training opportunities available in communities, discovering educational and training interests of segments of an adult community, leadership for administering an adult open learning program in a community.

Action in progress.

1. Tuition benefits for Learning Center staff for coursework and attendance at professional meetings.

2. Don and Diane will report on benefits from enrollment in Adult Education courses thru UNO, i.e., bibliography for Adult Education, important concepts learned, possible research questions, etc.

Recommendation 3. Examination of the role and effectiveness of present learning centers and the inclusion of such information in deliberations of the continuation, modification, or expansion of centers.

Action

Roger, Carol, Coordinators will be responsible for working on the topics explained on pages 44-46 of the report. New topics and sources for their information should be referred to these individuals.

Recommendation 4. The organizational relationship of SUN and UMA should be carefully articulated.

Action

1. Paul is interested in identifying one or more problems for SUN/UMA to approach in a team effort. After problem selection is made, recommendations for the team members will be made (probably working thru Bill Bondeson).

2. Milt, the Nebraska State Planning Coordinator, will represent SUN at the UMA Academic Council Meetings and report back on those meetings.

3. Milt with Dean Gessner will work with the Scottsbluff Center in identifying their market survey needs.

4. Carol, with Don and Judy, will investigate NETCHE working relationships.

5. Rosemary will continue to share student withdrawal information with Centers and R&E as data is collected for further research efforts.

Recommendation 5. The relationship of SUN to existing state "outreach" programs should be discussed and an appropriate strategy for implementation should be adopted.

Action

1. Milt will organize (after March 2) campus visits with top-level administrators. Will involve SUN Administration and Learning Center Coordinators.

2. Rosemary will continue to represent SUN at meetings with the UNL Adult and Continuing Education Department. Will also explore with them the possibility of internships for graduate students from that department in SUN Learning Centers.

3. Don will continue to work on channels of communication with UNO Extension and Continuing Education Department.

4. All Coordinators will renew efforts to work with individuals on particular campuses whose responsibility is in adult education/outreach programs and to whom referrals can be made.

5. Scottsbluff Center will continue to be one example of a blend of outreach efforts.

Recommendation 6. Experimentation with learning centers should be encouraged and supported.

Action

1. Judy and Carol will work with all Coordinators and R&E to identify research questions of interest to SUN as well as to potential funders.

2. Don, in his coursework, will also be alert to research areas.

Recommendation 7. If present learning centers are continued, or new learning centers initiated, learning center staff recommendations should be carefully considered as strategic input.

Action

1. Milt circulated recommendations for use of libraries as auxillary centers. Coordinators will respond to these recommendations.

2. Judy and Carol are working on plans to use monies left from a grant to Scottsbluff center for inclusion of some libraries as auxillary centers.

3. Directly relates to Recommendation #3 and action described there.

Recommendation 8. The results from the "Learning Center Staff Development Questionnaire" should be promptly followed up with learning center staff, SUN administration, and faculty, and UMA administration staff.

January 30th meeting began to speak to this recommendation as did prior meeting with Hassel, Williamson, Horner, and Sell.

Action

1. Carol will arrange trips to each center as follow-up to this meeting. At such time goals of coordinators and staff assistants might be further refined, individual evaluations started, etc. Such trips will probably occur in mid-march.

Attachment

Summary Data from the Learning Center
Staff Development Questionnaire

November 27, 1974

Enclosed for your completion is a "Learning Center Staff Development Questionnaire." The cover to the questionnaire explains its purposes and instructions for its completion.

Carol Williamson and the Research and Evaluation Office have worked closely in preparing this questionnaire. We feel that the questionnaire is one way to help us focus our present activities and to gain valuable input for future activities.

As you work through the questionnaire, you may have questions about the meanings or instructions for some items. We encourage you to try to complete all items, and in so doing want you to feel free to contact us for clarification. In addition, you may feel that at the present time you are not in a position to answer certain items; if so, please note on your response to that item. If additional space is needed to complete your responses to the items, please feel free to use the back side of the form or add additional pages.

We look forward to your responses. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for return of your completed form. Your individual remarks will be kept confidential and you need not sign the form.

Thank you!

Cordially,

Roger Sell
Research Associate

RS/bj
Enclosures

LEARNING CENTER STAFF DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The faculty and learning center staff working in the delivery system are the front line contacts between the learners and potential learners and the open learning enterprise. If the open learning system is to be open to individual needs, differences, and interests, and if it is to have the willingness and ability to meet learners where they are educationally, then these key staff must demonstrate the necessary knowledges, skills, and sensitivities.

There are few visible models for personnel working with adults who, for a variety of reasons, have been unable or reluctant to enter the traditional mainstream of postsecondary education. There are even fewer places which are attempting to train people for such roles.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey learning center staff for their view of their role, expectations, and training needs. The view of learning center staff is crucial if we are to develop training opportunities appropriate to their needs and a support system which nurtures their continuing development.

This questionnaire is in three parts. Part I asks for your responses to items concerned with the role of learning centers and learning center staff. Part II concerns your expectations and findings as a member of the delivery system team. The final portion of the questionnaire, Part III, requests your specific recommendations for future training opportunities, as well as your critique of training provided to date.

Each part of the questionnaire gives directions for its completion. Please complete all items in the questionnaire and return in the self-addressed envelope. Your individual replies will be kept confidential. Thank you for helping us to be of service to you.

PART I. ROLE OF LEARNING CENTERS AND THEIR STAFF

1. Learning centers have been described in a variety of ways. One way to describe learning centers is by the services they perform. To what extent do you think that learning centers <u>should</u> perform the following services:

	High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority
a. directing students into educational or training opportunities not offered by SUN	(7)	(1)	(0)
b. recruiting students for SUN courses	(3)	(3)	(2)
c. counseling students for vocational decisions	(2)	(6)	(0)
d. testing students for academic achievement in a SUN course	(3)	(3)	(2)
e. organizing student group discussions	(5)	(3)	(0)
f. getting students together for social purposes (i.e., open house, etc.)	(1)	(5)	(2)
g. surveying training or educational needs in the communities surrounding the learning center	(6)	(1)	(1)
h. tutoring students for special instructional needs	(2)	(6)	(0)
i. registering students for SUN courses	(3)	(3)	(2)
j. referring students for credit by examination, e.g. CLEP	(8)	(0)	(0)
k. cataloguing references for students use, e.g., college catalogues, newspapers, texts, reprints, etc.	(5)	(3)	(0)
l. maintaining student records, including background information, courses enrolled in, grades obtained, etc.	(6)	(2)	(0)
m. maintaining logs of students' use of the learning center services and materials	(4)	(2)	(2)
n. maintaining logs of activities of learning center staff	(2)	(3)	(3)
o. implementing and experimenting with new services	(1)	(0)	(0)
p. interpreting UMA and UNL	(1)	(0)	(0)
q. publicizing activities of learning center locally	(1)	(0)	(0)

List additional services here and check your response to the right.

		High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority
r.	personal contact with student	(1)	(0)	(0)
s.	counseling students for study habits and personal motivation	(1)	(0)	(0)
t.	contacts with placement services (e.g., state employment agency, job services, etc.) to refer students to experts in vocational placement	(1)	(0)	(0)
u.	looking for nontraditional learning experiences in the community	(1)	(0)	(0)
v.	sponsoring awareness sessions for community to get idea of what they want from the University in SUN, extension, etc.	(1)	(0)	(0)

2. Learning center staff may engage in a variety of activities related to the SUN program. Of the following potential activities in which you may engage, please do three things. First, check the response in the columns to the right which indicates how frequently you find the particular activity required. Second, use column (a) on the left to rank order (from 1 to n) the relative importance of each activity as you perceive it for staff at SUN Central. Third, use column (b) on the left also to rank order (from 1 through n) the relative importance of each activity from your own point of view.

(a) Importance to SUN Central*	(b) Importance to me*		Very Often	Often	Seldom	Nev
$\bar{x}$ = .456	$\bar{x}$ = .430	a. relating to the local community and otherwise serving as the public relations officer for SUN in your particular area	(2)	(3)	(3)	(0
$\bar{x}$ = .464	$\bar{x}$ = .496	b. maintaining pertinent records on all students	(4)	(4)	(0)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .621	$\bar{x}$ = .464	c. seeking out qualified individuals to serve as additional local tutors or counselors	(0)	(1)	(5)	(2
$\bar{x}$ = .338	$\bar{x}$ = .408	d. insuring that all SUN course components are readily available in the learning center	(5)	(3)	(0)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .351	$\bar{x}$ = .199	e. keeping informed on all educational programs available to meet individual needs	(3)	(3)	(1)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .473	$\bar{x}$ = .448	f. serving as a learning consultant for the center	(1)	(3)	(3)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .720	$\bar{x}$ = .670	g. serving as a liaison between SUN and "host" institution	(2)	(1)	(5)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .629	$\bar{x}$ = .588	h. serving as a liaison between SUN and other surrounding educational institutions	(1)	(0)	(6)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .513	$\bar{x}$ = .532	i. representing SUN to the educational institutions in your area	(2)	(0)	(5)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .564	$\bar{x}$ = .590	j. recruiting students in your local area	(3)	(3)	(2)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .595	$\bar{x}$ = .579	k. operating and overseeing the maintenance of all technical equipment located in the center	(3)	(4)	(1)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .738	$\bar{x}$ = .539	l. supervising the achievement assessment of all students coming to the center**	(2)	(2)	(2)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .493	$\bar{x}$ = .168	m. counseling students visiting the center	(0)	(6)	(2)	(
$\bar{x}$ = .462	$\bar{x}$ = .402	n. assisting students with the use of all materials in the center	(3)	(3)	(2)	(

*lower percentile means more important

**scoring omitted on one form for this item

Importance to SUN Central	Importance to me		Very Often	Often	Seldom	Never
$\bar{x}$ = .412	$\bar{x}$ = .380	o. advising students who contact the center by telephone	(4)	(1)	(3)	(0)
$\bar{x}$ = .819	$\bar{x}$ = .494	p. arranging group meetings for students wishing to study together	(0)	(2)	(5)	(1)
$\bar{x}$ = .440	$\bar{x}$ = .282	q. assisting students with course and general delivery problems	(2)	(4)	(1)	(1)
$\bar{x}$ = .358	$\bar{x}$ = .129	r. keeping close contact with students to maintain interest and motivation, and to reduce attrition	(4)	(4)	(0)	(0)
$\bar{x}$ = .373	$\bar{x}$ = .275	s. working to find additional ways to personalize and individualize the SUN instructional process	(1)	(4)	(3)	(0)
$\bar{x}$ = .778	$\bar{x}$ = .863	t. arranging social events such as open house.	(0)	(0)	(8)	(0)
_____	_____	u. clerical office procedures	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)
_____	_____	v. provide center with library materials on adult education and open learning	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)
_____	_____	w.	( )	( )	(	( )

3. The activities in which learning center staff engage may require special knowledge, skills, or sensitivities. While learning center staff may exhibit expertise in some areas, training or support may be required for other areas. Please check your responses to the following areas which may affect your ability to carry out the responsibilities you see.

	Knowledge, Skills, and Sensitivities Desired	Knowledge, Skills, and Sensitivities Already Possessed
a. Public speaking engagements before service clubs and other organizations regarding the SUN program.	(4)	(5)*
b. Counseling individuals.	(4)	(4)
c. Identifying resources available in the community which are potentially applicable for learning experiences	(6)	(3)*
d. Detecting and referring individuals in need of remedial or study skills.	(6)	(2)
e. Referring individuals to educational experiences other than those offered by SUN.	(6)	(4)**
f. Evaluating postsecondary educational objectives and programs in terms of expressed individual interests or needs.	(4)	(4)
g. Employing instructional technologies and materials.	(3)	(5)
List additional skill areas here and check your response to the right. (h. Interpreting UNL to public.	(1)	(0)
(i. Analyzing local educational means.	(1)	(1)*
(j. Applying principles of participative management.	(1)	(1)*
(k. Identifying specific contacts in other postsecondary programs.	(1)	(0)
(l. CLEP	(1)	(0)
(m. Extension Division	(1)	(0)
(n. Adult learners and their needs	(1)	(0)
(o. Open learning philosophies	(1)	(0)

*Listed by one respondent as both desired and possessed.

**Listed by two respondents as both desired and possessed.

PART II. LEARNING CENTER STAFF EXPECTATIONS

The purpose of this part of the questionnaire is to have you describe your expectations in coming to the SUN program and what you have found up to this point. In coming to SUN, what expectations did you hold for learning centers and the SUN program? Which of the expectations that you brought to SUN have been reinforced? Which of the expectations have changed? To what extent do you feel that you have support in doing your job, and how can your effectiveness be improved? Please address these and additional concerns which you may have about your expectations for learning centers and the SUN program.

PART III. STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Since your arrival at SUN, several training and development activities have been planned for you. As you look back on it, what was the value to you of (a) the initial week-long seminar held as the first learning center staff training activity, and (b) the one-day miniconference? How could these two activities have been improved? How do you judge the importance of the Allen Tough conference on adult learning? Would similar opportunities be a priority for you in the future? In what particular areas do you desire to expand your talents and skills and how can these be attained? What particular expertise might you have to offer the training of other learning center staff?